

*Resurrection Part One: Unquenchable Love*  
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Community Church of Providence  
September 22, 2024

Genesis 32:6-12 and 33:1-10  
Song of Solomon 8:6-7

One of my favorite poems is this one, written by e.e. cummings, a native of Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1950.

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth  
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any—lifted from the no  
of all nothing—human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

It's a poem I often visit around Easter, since it expresses the idea of how resurrection – spiritually speaking – might take place within each of us: the joyful acclamation, “i who have died am alive again today.” And, the offer of gratitude for having been “lifted from the no of all nothing.”

These are both expressions of the inexplicable renewal that can happen within us and the life-breath of God that brought us to be in our birth, bringing us back again when we thought we were lost to ourselves.

But... why preach about resurrection in September? Because resurrection is not just about Easter or about one stone being rolled away. It is always; it is many stones, closed over hope, that are rolled away. In places where there seemed to be only nothingness or darkness, God is able to create new life – in us as individuals and in communities of people. Nothing to something, darkness to light, despair to hope, hatred to love.

- Jeremiah the prophet, in chapter 31, talks about this when he imagines the exiles returning home: He says that God turns mourning into joy and trades sorrow for

gladness. “In the wilderness,” he says, “there is grace.”

- Mary sings about it when she is carrying Jesus in her womb: the lowly are lifted up, the hungry are made full.
- Naomi experiences it when, after her husband and sons had all died, she thought her life was barren. Her despair was so great that she changed her own name from “pleasant” to “bitter” – but then she finds herself, at the end of the story, holding a grandson, with hope for the future.

Resurrection sounds far away, and yet, in the sense I’ve just described, it is something accessible to us, found in those experiences in which God has brought us back in some way, from wandering to purpose, from shreds to wholeness.

To notice this about the stories of the people of faith and in our own life stories is to see that, in this turbulent world, there exists:

- Life that cannot be kept back (like a too full suitcase that won’t zip, it keeps working its way out)
- and Love that death is not able to take away, love that continues beyond death.

Indeed, we dare to make this claim, and it is a daring claim to make in this world in which people vie for power: God’s love is the strongest power that exists, stronger than death, yes, or hatred, or whatever else tries to defeat it.

Very simply said: There is Love that hate cannot stop; and even more there is Love that has the power to stop hate.

These are enormous claims, and they are foundational forces of hope. If we believe in this Unquenchable Love, then we will have a toehold of hope, a life buoy, when we look up the cliff or flounder in the ocean of our own lives. And, in the larger world, we will have courage and perseverance to work for God’s Beloved Community, even when it seems like we are losing ground, daring to believe that the forces of Love and Life are stronger.

There is love that hate cannot stop.

In the gospel of Luke, in the story of Jesus’ crucifixion, Luke shows us a glimpse of this unquenchable love; he is the only gospel writer that shares this part of the story: hanging on the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” His ability to offer love and unwillingness to hate at this moment may be the most powerful witness of all. When I try to imagine myself in Jesus’ circumstance, I feel like, far from love, I would be filled with fury.

The Song of Solomon is a collection of love poems, human and by analogy, Divine. The selection we heard today, ch. 8:6-7 talks about the strength of love, its power:

*love is strong as death  
fierce as the grave  
many waters cannot quench love  
floods cannot drown it*

There is love that hate cannot stop. And, there is love that has the power to stop hate.

This morning, we heard the story of Jacob and Esau, twins. When they were much younger, Jacob swindled Esau out of all that rightfully belonged to him and then skipped town for about 20 years. When Jacob made the return journey home, he was terrified of what his brother might do to him.

The road was long, and as Jacob and his family got closer to home, he sent messengers ahead with enormous gifts for his brother, to win him over, and the messengers came back with terrifying news:

*Esau is heading to meet you with 400 men!*

Jacob thought he was doomed, about to be destroyed. And so, thinking this may be his last night, he spent a wrenching night in prayer, and the next day hid his wives and children in the back of the traveling party.

Finally, Jacob saw his brother and those 400 men on the horizon and walked fatefully toward him, bowing as he went. But when he came near, Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, kissed him, and fell on his neck, weeping! Esau may have lost all of his possessions, but he possessed an unshakeable love for his twin brother.

There is a school in Jerusalem, you may have seen the story about it on the news a few months back, called the Hand in Hand school. It is one of very few schools in Israel (only six) that is not segregated, in which Jewish and Arab children learn together. The children learn both Hebrew and Arabic. Their history lessons are taught by two teachers, Israeli and Palestinian, and they teach the histories of both peoples.

The school counselor, who is an Arab, counsels Jewish students who have family members who were taken hostage and also children who have family members who have been killed in Gaza. She said to one Jewish mother, “my heart is with you.”

This school is based on the hope that love, when cultivated, has the power to stop hate.

Our human loves – the love of Esau for Jacob and of the schoolchildren for one another – aren’t perfect; as we know we sometimes (often?) fail in our ability to love. And yet all of our smaller loves (lowercase “l”) share in, are participants in, the great, eternal Love, which does not fail. We are gifted to carry a handful of that Love.

In April this year, when we celebrate Easter, that is the Love we will celebrate, that which could not be stopped by the hatred that condemned Jesus to death or the sorrow of the tomb. And every day, every day in which we open our heart to God and neighbor, we experience that Love at work in us.

Amen.