

“Resurrection”

Matthew 28:1-10

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The young man had played the violin since he was three years old. He'd graduated from high school in Indiana and was a freshman at the Julliard School of music in New York City on September 11, 2001. Given the horror he saw that day, he did what he could to ease people's pain—he played his violin. He performed for the soldiers from the Fighting Sixty Ninth Regiment as they returned from rescues and clean-up at Ground Zero. He says, “As I played, the soldiers would ascend the steps of the Armory, take off their helmets and smile. The whole experience challenged me to explore music's ability to change society. I wasn't sure what form that change would take, but I knew that after 9/11, all of us had to try harder than ever to reach out in peace.”

This young man is William Harvey. In the summer of 2005, Cultures in Harmony (CiH) was born with the mission of promoting cultural understanding through music. They have since conducted 40 projects in 16 countries. Here are a few of their projects.

- In Zimbabwe, they taught AIDS orphans how to write music inspired by water, highlighting water access issues at their school.
- In the Philippines, CiH and the Cartwheel Foundation worked with different indigenous groups to develop compositions celebrating their heritage.
- In Papua New Guinea, CiH helped the Yoro tribe create compositions about the environment, HIV/AIDS, and cultural preservation.
- In Egypt, they helped underprivileged girls from Alexandria compose music about their lives.
- Their project in Cameroon catalyzed the largest increase in membership ever seen by the Cameroon Nigeria Youth Movement.

Their concerts show what people can achieve when, together, we aim for beauty. In Konya,

Turkey, where the whirling dervish ceremony originated 700 years ago, CiH musicians became the first female musicians ever in Konya to join male musicians in accompanying the ceremony. CiH partnered with UNICEF in Moldova for a benefit concert that collected 7,000 books for their childhood literacy program. In Zimbabwe, their benefit concert for Eyes for Africa raised enough funds to restore sight to 145 people.

Connecting with other musicians establishes a level playing field between different cultures. CiH master classes for young classical musicians have benefited thousands in Qatar, Egypt, the Philippines, Zimbabwe, Mexico, Tunisia, and Afghanistan.

Again, according to their web site, “Cultures in Harmony forges connections across cultural and national barriers through the medium of music. Their international projects involve six key components:

1. Perform with local musicians,
2. Partner with humanitarian organizations,
3. Engage in dialogue,
4. Promote democratic values,
5. Affirm cultural diversity, and
6. Work with children.”

I don't know what happened on that day almost 2,000 years ago. I don't know. Something mysterious. Something special. I don't know for sure. I do know that I believe in our God who loves all creation—all creation—all people with a profound, humongous love and wants to be in a loving healthy relationship with all people. I believe God is a God we can trust, can be open to because God will influence us always for the best possible and will not hurt us to test us or in judgment. I believe that God knows what every human's choice should be in every moment, for there to be peace

and harmony throughout the world—no matter what our past choices have been. I believe that Jesus showed us how to live in this loving and trusting relationship with God, not how to die for God, but how to *live* for God, which unfortunately sometimes means dying—but most of the time means living hearty, full, meaningful lives of service. I believe the spirit of God that was in Jesus is in each of us, influencing, nudging, challenging us to live as Jesus did. And therefore, it doesn't matter that I don't know for sure what happened long ago because I believe the resurrection was not a one-time deal, but rather that it continues on throughout time as we live as Jesus did.

It seems to me that people like William Harvey, as executive director of Cultures in Harmony, gives as much if not more value added to the world than the young wealthy entrepreneur who declared that he contributed so much to the world that he deserved his wealth and that the middle class should be willing to sacrifice some of their pay to give him and others like him what they deserve. I do not see the resurrection in what he says and believes. I believe resurrection people are about peace and harmony existing throughout the world, not money and things. Resurrection people are about using our God-given gifts to bring about reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, affirmation, harmony, peace. Resurrection people trust God and are open to God's influence in every aspect of our lives. At home, at work, at school, with our neighbors and our friends, at our churches, synagogues, mosques, and shrines, it is as we let God live and love and heal through us that the resurrection continues. Resurrection people are about relationships, our relationship with God and with God's creation, including all the world's people.

What resurrections are happening now during this deadly and horrific pandemic? And secondly, how will we be changed, how will we be different? Twenty years from now, will we be a better world or who will we be?

Happening now—I keep hearing in the news, and conversations with folks that we are changing,

changing for the better. People are reaching out to each other in neighbourhoods and at work, not with hugs or by sitting down to eat together, but by singing from balconies, having drive-by birthday parties, visiting through the windows their friends, neighbours, and family members in nursing homes or hospitals. Neighbourhoods clapping for those who are on the front line: the medical people, first responders, researchers, and so many more that we don't even know about. Medical people leaving their homes to go where it's the worst in order to help. Or cut out paper hearts for windows in homes and businesses. The restaurant owners who are bending over backwards to be sure people have food. Businesses working hard to keep as many people employed as they can. Chalk drawing messages of hope, love, and support. The newspaper delivery guy who is delivering groceries to those in the neighbourhood and even beyond. And Mother Earth is thanking us as the Venice canals are now clear, the environment is better, and we realize that it is possible to fix the bad environment faster than we thought. Or Axel, a grade schooler from Lake City who, along with his grandmother, makes Crosses of Hope. They gather pieces of driftwood from along the shoreline, staple gun two pieces together in the shape of a cross, and add a tag explaining what it is. People from all over the country are requesting these Crosses of Hope and when money is offered, Axel and his grandmother refuse.

You, as people of faith, are there for each other in so many ways—phone calls, ZOOM meetings, e-mails, supporting each other. Giving money for the Ralph Reader Food Shelf and helping in ways I don't know about. Iris McGinnis who has started JOMP, the Joyce Olson Mask Project, in honour of her friend who, along with 13 people in this church, are sewing masks for AVIVO social workers and their clients who are homeless or addicts or otherwise in need. Or Captain Brett Crozier who I believe knew he was risking his career, but chose instead to write a memo and call attention to the situation on his ship. And I'm sure many other ships as well, which the Navy is now investigating. All of these stories are about the resurrection—finding new life in death.

This is now, but 20 years from now, what will our world be like? What changes will there be? I'll be almost 95—hopefully I'll be like Dee Weaver then and be able to experience the changes. Will the William Harveys of the world be making their positive and life-giving impact, bringing the people of the world together, or will the young entrepreneurs rule the world? As I asked in the e-Letter: What changes will we make—throughout the world—to ensure that the next pandemic isn't so deadly, so destructive? Changes in our culture, our politics, our economy, our educational systems, our religions? What is our role in making these changes?

I'm with you. I just want things to go back to the way they were. I want my hair cut now. The reality is that's not going to happen—yes, I'll get my hair cut, but the world will never be the same. So, as resurrection people, what do we want that makes our world a better place for all people? None of us have all the answers, but as we live into the future, as we live with the uncertainties and difficulties of this time, we know that the resurrection is about our ongoing relationship with God, our trusting in God, the work of God, the living for God. Let us accept the challenge and work with God to establish God's peaceable kingdom here on earth—just like Jesus did. Twenty years from now I want to hear the stories of the resurrection people that will come out of this pandemic. How will we be changed and be resurrection people?

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