

Life after resurrection

Salvation is not a place but a way of life.

by [Brian Bantum](#) in the [April 21, 2021](#) issue



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In our second April of the pandemic, spring has a distinctly hopeful air. Amid the new sprigs of green and the blossoms of pink and red, our lives are opening up a bit. There is the smallest crack in a door that has been closed for far too long.

It's appropriate that this time of contemplating life after COVID coincides with a season of reflecting on the days after the resurrection. The disciples' world had become enclosed and fearful and uncertain, only to open suddenly with possibility.

The past year has felt like one long, involuntary Lent. For some it has been forced isolation; for others, the economic necessity of work that puts you and your loved ones at risk. For all of us, the past year has laid bare realities of race and class and gender. They were never hidden, but during COVID-tide we saw just how deep the chasms are. Death has seemed too present this year.

Which brings us to the first crack of the stone, the first scent of the flowers and herbs our loved one is holding just outside our tombs. There is life beyond this.

But the promise of new life is never straightforward, is it? We don't always recognize liberation when it is announced to us or believe what we hear about good news. We have become accustomed to loss, have seen the sheer power and spite of empire strike down those we love and believe in. Sometimes the trauma and the struggle change us deep down in ways that make it seem impossible to go back to how things were.

I wonder if sometimes what obscures new life is our certainty of what salvation is supposed to look like. Jesus' followers struggled to fathom this new world that rang from an empty tomb. They could make sense of Palm Sunday, of miracles, of his rereadings of the prophets. Maybe they could even make sense of his violent death at the hands of the empire. They had surely seen that before. But life after the tomb was unfathomable.

As Jesus appears to the disciples in various miraculous ways, they are given a glimpse of something more than any heavenly or political salvation. Jesus' life with them after the rock is rolled away becomes a revelation of what he forged in 33 years of fleshy life. He was always drawing them and us into communion with God.

In his resurrected life he pours out who he is and reveals to us what has been born in that tomb—pentecostal beings, a confounding community. Perhaps most of all, he reveals that salvation was never a place but a way. In the resurrected one, we will never be without God, and God will never be without us. We are entwined, pushing, pulling, tumbling with one another. "The kingdom of God is here," Jesus tells us.

Salvation was not something the resurrection made possible. It had already begun in the incarnation. It was being knit into us with every step of Jesus' life, every conversation, every meal, every foot he took into his hands to wash. With each of these small acts he gathered the fragmentation of people's lives into his own life and breathed something of his love, his communion, his song into it. And it was this life that pressed against the fragmentation of empire, ethnocentrism, greed, and all the ways societies found to claim life for themselves and justify the death of others. The resurrection was the revelation of all that Jesus had been doing all along, ultimately offering that transformed life back into us, giving birth to us.

Of course, the disciples don't know any of this yet. They only know that their friend and teacher was dead, and now he is alive. What will their life look like now? What do they begin to do?

Which brings us back to our moment, this uncertain in-between when we are just beginning to see how the past year has shaped us, struggling to make sense of the vast inequity and ignorance that hold sway in our midst. We are trying to make sense of what to do when we can leave our homes again, but we know deep down we are different people than when this all began. What will we be?

The resurrection alone does not give us the answer. When we reflect on the incarnation of the one who would be resurrected, we see our own possibilities. A young woman says yes, lets her body hold God's body. She is not simply a vessel or an incubator. She is one who sees the hunger and the loss of her people. She feels the inequity and the violence. And to this woman God says, "I want to learn what it means to be human from her."

In her yes we see what it means to say, "We with God and God with us." We see our end already present.

When Jesus emerges from the tomb he is the firstborn of the new creation. We are with him in that womb. When he arises, we arise. When he walks, we walk. In becoming new creatures, we also become like Mary—God bearers.

Life beyond our homes will certainly bring exuberance and disorientation. May we, like Mary, live into the promise of the resurrection and our lives as creatures of the tomb—a life that enters into the uncertainty of migration to save lives, that walks our young ones to synagogue, that prays over them even when they seem to know more than we can fathom. This means watching them live a life that might lead to an early death and being there to quench their thirst. It means declaring the promises of God in our every day.

The resurrection is not only about overcoming death. It shows us what our lives mean now.

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "What will we be?"