

Holy Week 2020: Easter Day

12.04.2020
By Pat Bennett

Introduction

An overall introduction to Holy Week 2020 readings

One of our general principles in producing the weekly reflections for the Spirituality of Conflict project has been to avoid tying these too tightly to events current at the time of writing. However as we reach Holy Week 2020, we find ourselves in a world which has been radically altered: the Covid19 pandemic and its ongoing consequences have, for many folk – especially those of us in more privileged circumstances – reshaped our daily experiences, reframed our cherished narratives, and redrawn our tried and tested maps for navigating life. It seems wrong then to blithely write as though this were a Holy Week 'like any other'; and indeed now, more than ever, we need the wisdom embedded in the multi-levelled and richly textured narratives of the Gospels to challenge, comfort and guide us.

One consequence of the restrictions to movement and contact has been to call our attention to things which often go unheeded – such as the physical, mental and emotional spaces we inhabit, or to things that we take for granted such as human touch and interaction; this has in turn given me a different attentive focus when reading these familiar passages. Hence in these reflections I will be looking at the different types of *spaces* – intense, disputed, questioning, unsettling, profound and paradoxical, relational, courageous, disrupted, and enlightened – which the various characters occupy, and at how attention to these can help us to deepen our understanding of conflict and our responses to it. Thus whilst not referring directly to the pandemic, these reflections have nevertheless been influenced by it; you might also choose to use them as a way of reflecting on the particular conflicts which it has exposed or heightened, and of your own responses – of both complicity and resistance – to these, addressing what needs to be amended, celebrated or strengthened. This too seems a very appropriate way of journeying with Christ through Holy Week towards Easter and beyond.

For those of you who receive these readings by weekly email, please note that this reading, whilst stand-alone, is also the penultimate one in a themed sequence for Holy Week. The readings for Monday through to Saturday and for this evening, can be found on the Spirituality of Conflict website and are all labelled Holy Week 2020

Easter Day: Disrupted Space

Mary Magdalene and Mary, those faithful women who had stayed with Jesus as he

died and then been sidelined as he was buried, take the first opportunity they can after the suspended space of the sabbath, to come to the tomb and tend his body. They expect to find a sealed space – indeed their major concern in Mark's parallel account is how they will gain access to the body since they themselves are physically incapable of removing the stone which seals the tomb (Mk 16:3). And in this version of the story, that is indeed what they *do* find – even though, it seems, Jesus is already gone from its confines.

Text

Matthew 28:1–10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.”

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Comment

In the accounts of Mark, Luke, and John the stone has already been removed and Jesus has gone from the tomb before the women arrive. However Matthew gives a slightly different version – and in so doing alerts us to an important fact about the

disruption of the space which has held the body of Jesus.

When the women arrive in this version, the stone is still firmly in place and hence we might think that Jesus is as yet, unrisen. However what happens on their arrival decisively gives the lie to this. There is an earthquake as an angel rolls back the stone before their eyes, an event which causes the guards to faint with terror. We might expect that this dramatic moment of opening would be followed in swift order by the emergence of Jesus himself – but no! As the angel's words make clear, Jesus is already gone '*He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said*'

The tomb, with its rolled away stone is one of the most vivid images in the Easter story and the centrepiece of any Easter garden. Our reflex assumption is that the stone is removed in order for Jesus to come out – after all that would make sense in human terms – and that the confining space of the tomb is shattered and disrupted by the moment of resurrection itself. However Matthew's account suggests that we need to think about this the other way round: the disruption does not come from the inside, but from the outside – the stone is not rolled away to let Jesus out, but to let the witnesses in! The women, and later the disciples, see the empty tomb and begin to understand – a pattern which is repeated in different ways in the other Gospel accounts (indeed in the shorter ending of Mark the women never see the risen Christ, *only* the empty tomb). It seems that there was something particularly potent about being able to go into the space and find it different to how they had imagined.

In conflict situations too, the disruption of closed spaces may also sometimes be necessary. The temptation of course is to rush to think of all the ones belonging to other people or groups which annoy or thwart us and set about them with the mental equivalent of a lump hammer! However we ought perhaps to think *first* about the nature of some of our own narratives or practices and of whether it might in fact be they which are hindering progress towards resolution in particular situations. If that is so then how can we go about opening up or more vigorously disrupting these closed spaces in ways which enable progress in understanding and ultimately changes in thinking and action. What might be the dangers of this and how could we guard against them?

Response

Take some time to recall and revisit an occasion in your own experience (it need not necessarily be one involving conflict) where progress in resolving an issue was either impeded by a closed space which prevented proper or deeper understandings and connections; or facilitated when somebody was able to allow a closer look into their own understandings or practices. Is there anything you can learn from this which might help you develop your own understandings of, or skills in dealing with this type of thing in the context of a conflict situation? How might you become more aware of spaces in your own life which would benefit from a little disruption?

Prayer

Jesus
you knew
when and how
to disturb and disrupt –
not in pursuit of destruction
but in the service of

building
better understanding
deeper faith
stronger connections.

Gift us
a like wisdom
to recognise
those places in our lives
which need to be
broken open
in order
for new life
to take hold.

Amen.