

“Our Greater Home”

Rev. David Gregory

April 11, 2021

Easter 2



Jesus Goes Up Alone onto a Mountain to Pray (detail)

James Tissot

Readings

Acts 4:32-35 from the *Common English Bible*

The community of believers was one in heart and mind. None of them would say, “This is mine!” about any of their possessions, but held everything in common. The apostles continued to bear powerful witness to the resurrection, and an abundance of grace was at work among them all. There were no needy persons among them. Those who owned properties or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds from the sales, and place them in the care and under the authority of the apostles. Then it was distributed to anyone who was in need.

We Are of a Tribe

by Alberto Rios in *Healing the Divide: Poems of Kindness and Connection*

We plant seeds in the ground
And dreams in the sky,

Hoping that, someday, the roots of one
Will meet the upstretched limbs of the other.

It has not happened yet. Still,
Together, we nod unafraid of strangers.

Inside us, we know something about each other:
We are all members of the secret tribe of eyes

Looking upward,
Even as we stand on uncertain ground.

Up there, the dream is indifferent to time,
Impervious to borders, to fences, to reservations.

This sky is our greater home.
It is the place and the feeling we have in common.

This place requires no passport.
The sky will not be fenced.

Traveler, look up. Stay awhile.
Know that you always have a home here.

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Welcome to the second Sunday in Easter. Some of you may have heard me mention this in previous years, but Easter isn't just a single Sunday holiday; it's a season, just like Lent or Advent, and this year it takes in seven Sundays before the celebration of Pentecost on May 23. You may be wondering why this is of any importance at all. Well, the resurrection may seem like a great culmination of something, or even the end of a story, but for the apostles it was only the beginning. After the crucifixion, we see them dispersed and hiding until the women among them came with incredible news. The gospel portraits speak of sightings and communications with a risen Jesus, and whatever your view may be of those things, it is clear that they are trying to tell us that the story was really just beginning.

Their first realization was that nothing had turned out as they had wanted or expected. The apostles suddenly found themselves pivoting within a different creative reality from what they ever could have envisioned, and in the midst of that pivot they did the one thing they could remember to do: they cared for one another as they would care for themselves, just as Jesus had taught them. The words from their last Passover were ringing in their ears, "This is how everyone will know that you are my followers, by the way you love each other." It wasn't about teachings or doctrines, it wasn't about subscribing to one set of ideas or another, it was just . . . love.

The apostles could not explain all that had just happened, but they could do the thing that needed no explanation, the thing that was always right, always for the best, and never called into question. In some of the earliest writings of the New Testament—earlier than the gospels themselves—the Apostle Paul said "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ, or the "New Commandment" Jesus left behind: "Love one another as I have loved you." So this becomes the season of love, something that even seven Sundays cannot contain. Welcome to the brightness, the joy, and the love of this new day.

I'd like to point out that there are some inescapable parallels between our own experience and that of the early apostles. If we take a good hard look at the last year and a half, I think we could agree that nothing has turned out like we wanted or expected. Individually, our lives were moving along in a certain direction, and as a community we were experiencing some momentum. We could see, perhaps, a future for our church that we were co-creating. However, as news began to circulate about a new mysterious virus that had appeared in another part of the globe, it began to get our attention, which turned to inquisitiveness, and then to concern. Ultimately it changed the course of our everyday lives, and for over a half million Americans and their loved ones, the losses have been devastating. As we moved into the holiday season of 2019, none of us thought it could turn out this way, but of course it has, and it has us pivoting within a different creative reality from what we could ever have imagined. And when we are faced with such massive change, and we struggle to think of what to do next, perhaps it is time to do what the apostles did. They remembered the simple commandment of Jesus: "love each other." The old admonition still holds true, perhaps now more than ever before.

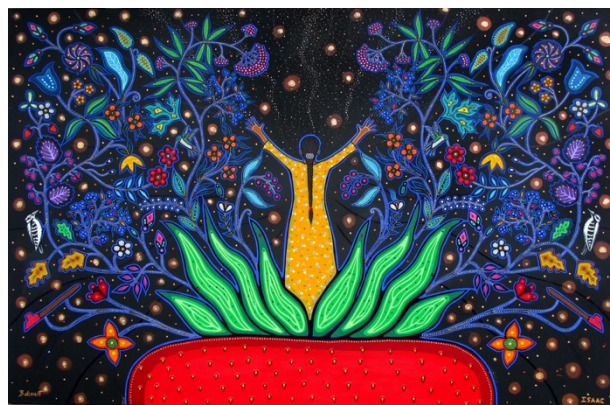
I recently discovered a poem by Alberto Rios in the collection entitled, *Healing the Divide: Poems of Kindness and Connection*. The poem itself is called "We Are Of a Tribe," and I think it addresses—in a contemporary way—the same way forward that was discovered by these Jewish peasants of the first century. Like us, they "stood on uncertain ground." Like us, they—together—had an understanding, their "secret tribe of eyes" focused in the same direction, upward. They may have been looking for a return of

their Messiah, but we look for our own Messiah, the dreams we have planted in the sky that are growing just like the seeds we have planted in the ground. Resurrection means that we have a greater home than the one we knew before. This greater home is evident in our ability to cast a vision, to dream a dream, to place our deepest desires into the quantum and establish a new faith that creates a new reality. The possibilities are endless if we are willing to view them that way.

Yesterday I took one of my longer walks on a path that I had known about but never experienced before. It took me into territory I had driven through many times, but on foot it was a different world, seen in far greater detail and from many different vantage points. In my car I had no interaction with the birds, the squirrels, or the tiny lizards. I had no thought for greeting the cows that were lounging in the shade of a eucalyptus tree, or my fellow hikers who seemed friendlier than ever before. I had no idea that the world is now filled with wildflowers that stand in stunning bouquets made without hands. I found myself wondering: *Were it not for a global pandemic, would I ever have slowed myself to experience the world in this way? Would I ever have stopped my obsession with the calendar, or with racing up and down the highway burning fossil fuels to get to this or that meeting so that I could grace the world with my own leadership and share the wise words that I alone could offer?*

The world that I live in now is not the world that I envisioned. It is one that has seen the trauma of untold loss. As the poet tells us, living in this “tribe of eyes looking upward,” we see a dream that is “indifferent to time, impervious to borders, to fences, or to reservations.” It gives some semblance of meaning to our losses, helps us find some sort of wisdom in the universe, a way of knowing that the path we’re on is the one we’re meant for. This sky is our home, a dwelling place that is greater than anything we’ve ever seen before, and it’s as available to us as our own ability to imagine.

This, I believe, is the essence of resurrection. It is the means by which we hope, by which we love, and by which we create. It is also the means by which we live a new life. To say that this is a new beginning is an understatement. We are at the precipice of imagining a whole new way of life, and in this moment, we can also be grateful for a break in the old one. We are the tribal elders for all who will come after us. It is a powerful moment, and it welcomes us home.



New Beginnings
Christi Belcourt and Isaac Murdoch