

Composting is weird. Honestly, I'm just in the beginning stages of learning how to keep plants alive, much less a whole garden, and the idea of compost to nourish the soil is both incredibly beautiful and super weird. I take what has died, my food scraps, eggshells, coffee grounds, old leaves, whatever, and put it in a bucket, and some Creator joy works something like magic amidst the scraps and makes the most nutrient-dense, beneficial plant food there is. What is that? The worm option for compost still freaks me out too, and I don't yet know if I'm brave enough to venture into that territory.

But in its most basic form, we take what is discarded, what is dead, what is no longer useful, do something intentional with it, and from that bucket of death comes the power to bring life. It's too good and beautiful and creative and wild for any person to come up with that, it has to be the One who comes with the power to create life.

And then, you till that compost into the soil as you plant new things, veggies and herbs and flowers and things to nourish your body and spirit, and that dark, rich stuff works with the light of the sun and fresh water to bring forth growth and sustenance. The death of the old is exactly what nourishes the new life out of the ground.

I'll be really blunt about it - we are hearing about a lot of death these days. Death from the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic. Death due to police violence. Death from diseases and accidents and systemic racism and ableism and mental illness and all these soul-crushing things. So admittedly, seeing death all over the place in this week's scriptures was overwhelming, that in yet another area of life we are hearing more about death.

As hard as it can be, we have to acknowledge the realities of the death around us. We cannot turn away from the very real death that threatens us and our neighbors every single day. It's not a matter of choice, but rather a

matter of being compelled. As people of God committed to loving God and our neighbors, we cannot ignore the suffering of our neighbors. To ignore the suffering of others is to be complicit in causing them pain. We have to do what we can to protect and keep each other alive. We are called in the deepest parts of our hearts and souls and foundations to be the love of Christ in the world and we are compelled by the call to befriend the stranger and be disciples in unity. Above all else, we are called to follow Christ and love God and neighbors. As we see our neighbors dying, we have to learn why they are dying and face those difficult realities. Listening and learning is the first step.

But we do not have to linger in the death. We don't have to hold heavy hearts forever. We must not be paralyzed by their perishing. It's what we do with the death that matters.

The most crucial part of our faith, the thing that absolutely turned the whole world rightside up rather than upside down was Jesus' resurrection. Death came first, yes, but death was not the final answer. The resurrection is what we glorify and praise in worship, not the death itself. If we claim to be the Easter people, the people of the Good News in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then we must focus on the newness of life, the resurrection hope, the powerful force of life that casts out the shadows of death. The death is real. Knowing the death is there is necessary. But knowing too that there is new life coming from that death is even more necessary than dwelling in death.

Certain things must die in order for new life to rise up. This is the resurrection promise and the resurrection hope, the hope that surpasses any and all powers of any principality or ruler or kingdom or threat or regime. Even in the face of death, new life rises forth in power and truth and love. (repeat)

So what new life can spring forth from these old things that are dying?  
What is being resurrected in this time?

If we think about the plants, that sweet garden in our minds, the nourishment from compost helps to nourish life from the ground. We recognize the death from the compost, working with the dark soil, working with the light of the sun, all together to bring forth the new, green, colorful, nourishing life. Death and life, patterns and cycles, creation and intention, work together for growth and new life. Darkness is not the problem, light is not the only solution - too much of either would kill this little plant. But rather, it's in these elements of life working together that nourishment and new life come forth.

In our Gospel text today Jesus talks about divisions, of setting people against one another.

But the divisions that Jesus is talking about here are divisions related to whether or not the people follow Jesus, not some sort of earthly or human-created division. It is not the desire of God to have us divided and embattled with one another, but rather with the things that prevent us from doing as Jesus commands us - to love God and love our neighbors. In the first verses of this Gospel reading, Jesus talks about people being like one another. Jesus says the disciple is not above the teacher, but that the disciple should be like the teacher. In being like one another, in recognizing that sameness, they can band together to fight against the evils that may threaten them both, that threaten them all.

We as humans are so much more alike than we are different. We are strengthened most by our working together, not by our divisions. We are all created children of God, beloved and known even so every hair on our head is counted. And this joining together, working together, learning and growing together, uniting difference and in relationship is what will truly bring forth new life for all people.

God holds us all and values us and teaches us not to fear, though there are plenty of things that could incite fear. And certainly talk of death is one of

the biggest fears many of us hold. But more often than not, we fear what we do not know or understand.

Friends, do not fear the newness. Does not God see us as more valuable than the sparrows? Does Christ not die for our very sake, for the saving of our souls and unending grace and mercy that can only be divine? Newness may be scary, but it is the power of life itself that comes from the death of the old and the resurrection of the new, the human, the love of our neighbors. In beginning to understand, in seeing the truth of the world around us, that fear begins to dissipate. And praise God, that the Holy Spirit still gives us breath and life to work as one body as we move towards this new life.

Jesus says to us today, “do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” In community as one body of Christ together, with the love and power and grace and mercy and soul-saving new life of Jesus Christ our souls cannot be killed. It is in the strength we find in Jesus’ resurrection, the power of new life that truly defeated the fear of death and the grave that our souls remain alive. Our souls are filled with life when we keep Christ at the center of our lives, our hearts, minds, souls, and most importantly, our actions. When we act upon this new life and love of Christ that we are given unendingly, our souls cannot be killed. Our souls, centered on Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, our Holy Advocate, are strong enough to bear the birthing pains of new life. Are strong enough to dig roots into a new foundation made possible by both the darkness and the light. Are strong enough to hope for a new and better life for all of God’s children. It is only by the power of Christ Jesus himself that we have this unity.

So, my dear friends in Christ, take some time to consider - what death in your life must occur in order for new life to spring forth? What things are holding you captive or afraid that need to die in order to give you new life? I pray that we may all discover these things, repent from them, grieve the

death if we must, but then truly focus on the newness of life that comes forth. I pray that the new seeds we plant in our minds and in our souls will grow forth in strength and love and unity. And I pray that the promises of Christ Jesus, the promises of hope and new life, will nourish your souls in every time and place. Thanks be to God, Amen.