

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, April 7, 2021. Thank you so much for tuning in and for taking this time out of your day to focus on God and focus on your faith.

Happy Easter, everyone!! What a joy it is to celebrate the hope and new life of the risen Jesus Christ with you all in this wonderful season. After what felt like a very tough Lent for many of us, and of course, an extremely tough year plus for us all, the hope of the risen Christ on Easter just hits a little different. Hope has some more real depth for us this year, and though it's taken a really tough series of events to get here, thanks be to God for the depth with which we are experiencing hope and Easter this year.

One key part of this hope and new life this year that is really sticking with me was best summed up by the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, a fellow ELCA pastor and well-known author and speaker. She's calling it "resurrection, not reversal". Resurrection, not reversal. What she says is that resurrection is indeed a new creation, it does not ignore the intense reality of Jesus' torment and death that led him to the cross. Though the resurrected Jesus is truly Jesus, something fundamental has changed. There is new life in Jesus, it's not the old Jesus coming back like nothing happened. It's a risen Lord, in His body, with scars and wounds on his hands and side and spirit that gives us that hope and new life, a new creation, a new covenant, a new way of worshipping the Lord.

As we start to embrace new life, new creation, and new hope with the pandemic slowly starting to end (thanks be to God for the vaccines!), this idea of resurrection and not reversal seems particularly poignant for us all. Life will not and should not entirely reverse back to what it was before this pandemic, I think there are some lessons and skills and insights we've gained from this time that should be taken forth as we start to resurrect parts of our life that have sadly been laid in a tomb, so to say, for the last year plus. For example, I am so looking forward to seeing you all for small worship services in person so soon, dear friends, (June 6! Check out our website for more details!) and I look forward to exploring how we can continue to have a strong online ministry presence as we move into the future at Mt. Zion. As another example, I pray that folks have more flexibility in working from home for certain jobs, as that can really enhance quality of life. We do not need to leave everything from this tough season behind in order to faithfully move forth into new life. God is with us in our transformation, our growing, our newness too, and for the encouragement towards new life because of the risen Jesus, we give unending thanks and praise.

So friends, as we celebrate our resurrected Jesus, I invite you to explore ways in which you have changed over this past year plus - what you look forward to resurrecting and the new things will continue to give you life, not simply reverse back for the sake of ease or the way you've always done things. What are some things from this time of pandemic that you wish to take forth with you as life moves into this new chapter? And how is God with you in the midst of this discerning? I pray that you will be able to see life for the new creation it is becoming, and that the resurrected Jesus gives you hope for that new life and new creation.

For our scripture today, I invite you to hear the words of Paul the apostle in the book of Romans. In this scripture, he connects the resurrection of Jesus to our own resurrection through baptism, and I pray that these words give you some encouragement, to know God is with you in your journey of new creation. This is Romans 6:3-11:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Let us pray:

Lord God of every time and place, we give you thanks for the new life and new creation given to us in the resurrection of your Son Jesus. Thank you for the radical hope we are feeling these days, thank you for the tireless work of vaccine researchers, distributors, and all essential workers, from whose efforts we are now able to envision a safer, hopeful future into this year and beyond. For all the ways you provide new life for us, in unexpected times, through difficult seasons and growth, and in the daily promises of dying to sin and rising with Christ, we give you thanks and praise. Help us as we discern how we have grown in this year, how we can avoid simple reversal, and instead lean into the resurrection of life. May we keep our love for you and our neighbors at the center of all we do and believe, O God. In the name of the resurrected Jesus and united with the Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.

Go in peace, dear friends, have a beautiful rest of your day! Amen.