

Homily - Resurrection

Rob Keim

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There is a genre of fiction that I find myself reading these days. Maybe you have read it as well. It is called speculative fiction. To be honest, until a few weeks ago, I had never heard of this category of fiction, even though I have been reading it for a while.

For me, speculative fiction is when you change one thing about reality and then watch and see how it plays out through the rest of the story.

What would society and culture and history be like if Nazi Germany got the bomb first?

How would we be different if JFK had never been killed?

It can be interesting to ponder how our world would change if an event in history had been different.

Speculative fiction can also be about the future. What if there is a plague? What if there is a cure to cancer? What if we have faster than light space travel?

Many books have been written about these “what if’s.” And, fully flushed out alternative societies and cultures have been created. These novels can be quite fascinating, though you have to go with the premise of the speculation and let go of skepticism.

Last week I finished a speculative fiction novel by Adam Silvera called “They Both Die at the End.” The premise of this speculation is that everyone who is dying in the next twenty-four hours gets a phone call shortly after midnight telling them that they are going to die. The book never talks about how this is able to happen, but it does talk a lot about how society and culture are changed when everyone has a short preview

to their own death. Again the premise is that everyone who is going to die before midnight the next day is notified.

Let go of the absurdity, and go with it for a moment.

In this alternate world where you know you are about to die, many have a quick funeral before they die.

Many quickly check off one or two things from their bucket list if they know they are going to die in the next twenty-four hours. Conversely, you probably don't go to work on your last day of life.

Some put their affairs in order, or bring fixes to relationships that needed some extra work. And, it is not just the person who is about to die that has their world turned upside down. If you find out that a loved one or friend got the "about to die" phone call, then your day is going to be disrupted as well.

Or, if you find that you are around a lot of people who received the "about to die" phone call, then you may exit quickly so that you don't get caught in the middle of some type of disastrous event. Large gathering of those who are going to die can be quite dangerous to the bystanders. One might get wounded in the deadly crossfire.

Now, on the upside, if you don't get a phone call, then you know you are not going to die in the next day. You can have a bit more peace of mind. Anxieties may be assuaged if you know for certain that neither you nor your loved ones will die in the next day. Conversely, one can get rather reckless if you know you won't die the next day, though your carelessness could still mean you are mortally injured and die three days later.

If you can let go of the bizarreness of the premise, then speculative fiction can be fascinating to work through. Though today is about Easter and not about speculative fiction. However, like speculative fiction, our Christian faith has us accepting some pretty fantastic beliefs.

As a case in point, today, we have our annual celebration of the events of two thousand years ago in which Jesus was raised from the dead.

Back in the thirteenth century, Franciscan philosopher and theologian John Duns Scotus taught that the Christ was the very “first idea” in the mind of God. In other words, God wanted to manifest the Godself externally, so an eternal love affair could begin between matter and God who is spirit. This divine love affair, eventually called “the Christ,” has been unfolding and manifesting since the beginning of time. Jesus came as its personification a mere 2000 years ago. Maybe this was when human consciousness was finally mature enough for a face-to-face encounter.

Now, Jesus is the living embodiment of the Christ. And if the Christ is infinite, then no understanding of this second person of the Trinity fully encapsulates this reality. Jesus, however, is a finite point of reality which opens the door to knowledge of infinite reality, and thus “knowing Jesus” means a glimpse into the second person of the Trinity.

And through Jesus we can understand that the Christ is the perfect union between an infinite God and finite creation. In other words, the Christ is the flawless joining of matter and spirit and two thousand years ago, the baby Jesus is the complete joining of human and divine.

And, that perfect union of God and human died. Jesus was betrayed by friends and society. Then he suffered and died on the Cross. Afterwards, Jesus body was laid in a tomb. It was not a fake death. It was not death-like. Jesus, the perfect union of God and human, died the same death that each one of us will die as well. Our circumstances may be different, but each one of us shares a common experience with Jesus. Like him, we die.

And, sometimes we need to be reminded that Jesus’ death was not a plan-B to offset things that had gone wrong. The death of Jesus, the perfect union of God and human was the plan from the beginning of time. Maybe the same is true our deaths as well.

Now, death is not just the death of the physical body, but all the times we hit bottom and must let go of how we thought life should be and surrender to a Larger Power. And in that sense, we all probably go through many deaths in our lifetime. These deaths to the small self are tipping points, opportunities to choose transformation. Unfortunately, most people turn bitter and look for someone to blame. So their death is indeed death for them, because they close down to growth and new life.

God uses the very things that would normally destroy us—the tragic, sorrowful, painful, or unjust—to transform and enlighten us. Now we are indestructible; there are no dead ends. This is what we mean when we say we are “saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus.” This is not a one-time cosmic transaction, but the constant pattern of all growth and change. Jesus is indeed saving the world by guiding us through all would-be deaths to a life that is always bigger than death.

Many of the happiest and most authentic people I know love a God who walks with crucified people and thus reveals and “redeems” their plight as God’s own. For them, God is not observing human suffering from a distance but is somehow in human suffering with us and for us. Such a God includes our suffering in the co-redemption of the world, as “all creation groans in one great act of re-birth.”

Today we celebrate the re-birth of Jesus, the perfect union of God and human. Today we remember that the universe was changed forever by the resurrection of Jesus. The tomb is empty. The body is no longer dead. Jesus is both the same as he was before his death but also transformed by death. In this way Jesus continues to give us a window into the Christ.

For, Christ reveals the necessary cycle of loss and renewal that keeps all things moving toward ever further life. The death and birth of every star and atom is this same pattern of loss and renewal, yet this pattern is invariably hidden, denied, or avoided, and therefore must be revealed by Jesus—through his life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus joins us in suffering, but we also join Jesus in resurrection. We partner with him in the cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

Now for much of the world, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are like speculative fiction. The premise is bizarre. Listen to some of them again.

Jesus is the perfect union of God and human. As the perfect union of God and human, Jesus was willing to suffer death on the Cross. And, after death Jesus is resurrected back to life, a resurrection that is a foreshadowing of the same resurrection that is for all of us. We are all part of the cosmic cycle.

Just like the speculative fiction that I talked about a few moments ago, all of us here today can see that the Jesus stuff is an interesting proposition, but the reality of it is still fantastic.

I want to acknowledge that this reality is bizarre, fantastic and hard to accept. But, it is still real. Though there is no scientific evidence, though there will never be proof in this life time, we still have a God who worked through the perfect joining of God and human. We have Jesus, a man of history, and space, and time.

Many do believe in the bodily resurrection, as do I. But, in a way, that asks little except a mere intellectual assertion of a religious doctrine. We can go much further than that. I choose to believe in some kind of bodily resurrection because it localizes the Christ mystery in this material and earthly world and in our own bodies, the only world we know and the world that God created and loves. I have faith that this is true.

I have faith in Jesus. I have faith in a God of love. I have faith in the efficacy of the Cross and the Resurrection. This is a faith that is deeper than the temporary suspension of reality needed to enjoy speculative fiction. It is a faith that embraces the fantastic and allows my life to be changed.

We are all in different places on our spiritual journey through life and death. We are each in different places with our faith. My prayer for all of

us here today is that we be aware of the depth of our own faith. How much do you embrace the efficacy of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? Is your faith changing the way that you live your life? Do you want to go deeper in your spiritual journey to be in healthier loving relationships with God, other and self? Image what a beautiful life that would be for us as individuals and as a world.

Parts of this homily are based on taken from Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations from the Center for Action and Contemplation.