

Resurrection: a holy discipline



In Luke 20:36, we are called “children of the resurrection.” What does this mean? Is it a reference to a future event, a resurrection of our spiritual selves? Or might it have implications for our lives and the lives of others here and now?

Resurrection—this word is the center of our Easter celebration. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is arguably the defining point of Christian faith—but how else is resurrection experienced? Will our bodies be resurrected from our graves one day? Clergy, scholars and fiction writers alike have been imagining and struggling with just what resurrection might mean since before the time of Jesus.¹ From discussions of resurrection throughout books such as Acts and 1 Corinthians, we can tell that there is great uncertainty about just exactly what Jesus’ resurrection might mean for us.

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Let me share an example of what I mean. In my work as Fistula Stories² Coordinator for The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., I have heard many stories of resurrection from around the world. Obstetric fistula is a childbirth injury that occurs when a woman with an

1 See Jesus’ arguments with Sadducees, or scholars of Torah law and interpretation, in Matthew 22, Mark 12, and Luke 20.

2 To learn more about fistula, its causes and treatment, and to learn what you can do, visit www.FistulaStories.org

obstructed labor cannot get to a hospital or receive immediate care. Often she is in labor for days, but the baby cannot get out. The pressure on her pelvis cuts off the blood flow to her tissue, and it falls away, leaving a hole between either her vagina and bladder or rectum, or sometimes both. This hole leaves her incontinent, leaking her bowels constantly so that she smells, is perpetually wet and becomes shunned by her family and friends. As you might guess, the women who suffer from fistula are some of the poorest women in the remotest parts of our world—and the life they lead, abandoned, stinking, ostracized—might be worse than death.

But the story does not end there. Through a surgery that costs only around \$300, the fistulas can often be repaired completely and women's lives can be restored. Many organizations that work with fistula sufferers have created comprehensive rehabilitation programs so that spiritual, mental and emotional wounds can be mended as well. Some women become fistula advocates in their communities, spreading the word—spreading life—with their own stories. Can you see this story of fistula as an example of women *practicing resurrection* as a holy discipline supported by corporate action taken by women for women and the whole world?

The purpose of this resource is not to argue that resurrection has no spiritual implications. Rather, as *children of the resurrection*, let us explore a new experience of resurrection. Together let's consider how resurrection might appear in our everyday lives here and now.

How to Use This Resource

Flexibility: *This resource can be used in any number of ways by an individual or a group. You may use it for a one- or two-day retreat, or you may wish to use the material over three consecutive weeks or months in three 90 minute or two hour sessions. You might consider breaking up each session into several meetings with journaling done at home in between, or you could use each session as a longer study tool. For example, a group might meet for months or years continuing to discuss and share disciplines related to their stories of personal resurrection. A congregation might convene its members to discuss communal resurrection quarterly or annually. Or a social action group might form out of the discussion of global resurrection in session three, which identifies projects and provides opportunity for the community to participate in the discipline of resurrection in our world.*

Intergenerationality: *One of the places of despair and fear we hear about most is the desire for younger people to become more involved in our church communities. Here is one resurrectional discipline: Have each member of your group commit to invite or bring one younger woman to your meetings. (Hint: If you do not know any younger women, this may be part of the problem.) Consider ahead of time whether this invitation would require you to make childcare or a meal available for your guest and/or her children.*

For women only?: *This resource is written for use in groups of women, but it would also be fruitful if used in groups of men or co-ed settings. Break the ice by encouraging the participants not to take themselves so seriously. Discomfort is easily reduced through an attitude of playfulness, saying "This might feel new, different or strange; but I'll just give it a try and see what happens."*

Journaling: *Suggestions for journaling are included in all three sessions. To supplement this resource, consider providing each participant with a copy of [Journaling: Creating Your Own Sacred Writings](#), another resource from Women of the ELCA.*

Session One: Practicing Personal Resurrection

Opening questions for reflection

What is your understanding of resurrection in your personal faith?

Can you think of a story from your life or one that you have heard from someone else that you would consider to be a story of resurrection—a move from death to life?

Scripture Passage: Mark 16:1–8

Read the passage silently or aloud. You may want to read through the passage more than once, with different voices reading each time, or with different bodily experiences (e.g., listen with your eyes closed as someone else reads, read through aloud yourself, read through silently, listen with your palms open or any other way you would like).

Questions for discussion

What strikes you in hearing/reading this passage? Is there something you have not noticed before?

Many biblical scholars believe that the book of Mark at one time ended after verse 16:8. Would this ending change your view of resurrection? How?

Journaling

Is there a time in your life that you think of as a change from death to life? If not, is there a place in your life in which you feel death and wish for life? Write about it.

Read back through what you wrote and focus on the feelings you had/have at each part of the experience. Do you identify at all with the feelings of the women in Mark 16:8? When did/do you feel terror, amazement or fear?

As you are willing, take time to share with one another the stories about which you have journaled. Listen to one another without judgment, paying special attention and care to hear and understand feelings of terror, amazement and fear.

Closing questions for reflection

Why do you think terror and fear are so closely linked with experiences of resurrection?

What have you learned for your journey from these stories?

Closing action

Write down one area of your personal life in which you feel death and desire new life. Share these with the group as you are willing and lift them up in a closing prayer. Commit to take one of the following actions as a discipline of resurrection: praying, journaling, talking with a friend or counselor about the issue or taking another action that seems appropriate.



Session Two: Practicing Communal Resurrection

Opening questions for reflection

Take turns sharing with one another what parts of the last session stuck with you after you left—especially if you have new members in the group.

Have you noticed any change in the areas you wrote down at the end of the last session? Did it make a difference to you that you shared them with the group? Explain.

Are there any disciplines of resurrection (praying, journaling, talking with a friend about the issue, etc.) that you have undertaken or are considering as a result of the last session?

Scripture passage: Mark 16:9–20

Read the passage silently or aloud. You may want to read through the passage more than once, with different voices reading each time, or with different bodily experiences (e.g., listen with your eyes closed as someone else reads, read through aloud yourself, read through silently, listen with your palms open or any other way you would like).

Questions for discussion

What strikes you in hearing/reading this passage? Is there something you have not noticed before?

What actions are necessary for the community to move from death and despair to hope and life in this passage? Who acts?

Journaling

Where do you feel death or despair in your community? Is there a time you can remember your community moving from death to life?

Look back over what you wrote. What actions were necessary for your community to move from death to life, or what actions can you imagine might be necessary?

As you are willing, take time to share with one another the stories about which you have journaled. You may want to make a list of the current areas of despair/death that are lifted up. If you do not share the same feelings about a situation someone else lifts up, ask them to tell more about their feelings. Listen to understand where they are coming from, knowing that they will do the same for you.

Closing Questions for discussion

Are there areas of death/despair in your community that have been lifted up by multiple people? Which of these areas feel most in need of resurrection?

Closing action

Commit to take one of the following actions: continuing to lift these areas of death and despair in prayer, convening a larger or more diverse group from your community to discuss these and other areas and brainstorm ways to move from despair to hope or taking another kind of action that seems appropriate to your group.

Join in a closing prayer that gives thanks for the resurrection seen in your community and lifts up the areas of despair and death you have named.

Session Three: Practicing Global Resurrection

Opening questions for reflection

What do those in your group know about global women's issues (e.g., maternal health and maternal mortality, women and poverty, girls and education, access to training and jobs, etc.)? What do you feel as you hear these stories—fear, terror, amazement, despair, hope?

It is easy to see the woman with the hemorrhage and the young girl who is brought back to life as stories of resurrection—and equally easy to point to places in our world where this resurrection is needed. What about your community? Where do you recognize yourselves in the story?

What stories of resurrection do you know from around the world? Are there organizations, congregations or missions with which your community partners that are doing this work?

Journaling

Just like the crowd gathered at Jairus's home that laughs, many people would say that resurrection is impossible or laughable. Are there places of deep despair in our world in which you feel change is impossible or laughable? What are they?

Think back to the areas you lifted up at the beginning of this session. Do you think that you can have a part in the discipline of resurrection in any of these areas? Why or why not? How?

As you are willing, take time to share with one another the stories about which you have journaled.

Scripture Reading: Mark 5:21–42

Read the passage silently or aloud. You may want to read through the passage more than once, with different voices reading each time, or with different bodily experiences (e.g., listen with your eyes closed as someone else reads, read through aloud yourself, read through silently, listen with your palms open or any other way you would like).

Questions for discussion

What strikes you in hearing/reading this passage? Is there something you have not noticed before?

Did you know?

Women of the ELCA resources, such as this one, are available free to individuals, small groups, and congregations. Covering a variety of topics, we are bringing Lutheran perspectives and new voices to issues that matter. By making a donation to Women of the ELCA, you will help us continue and expand this important educational ministry. Give online at womenoftheelca.org or mail to Women of the ELCA, ELCA Gift Processing Center, P.O. Box 1809, Merrifield, VA 22116-8009.

Closing question for reflection

Is there a place of death and despair in our world to which your group is being called to practice resurrection?

Closing Action

Commit to take one of the following actions: continuing to lift these areas of death and despair in prayer, convening a larger or more diverse group from your community to discuss these and other areas and brainstorm ways to move from despair to hope or taking another kind of action that seems appropriate to your group.

Join in a closing prayer that gives thanks for the resurrection seen globally and lifts up the areas of despair and death you have named.