

Jeremiah 17: 5-10
1 Corinthians 15: 12-20

It was my 36th birthday, and I was living the dream: playing soccer on Kaua'i with all of my friends. It was the last play of the game, next score wins - "the golden goal" - when I saw Juan, my friend and coach of 59 years, collapse on the ground. We thought a younger player had elbowed him, but when the poor kid said he didn't touch the guy, we saw Juan facedown, clutching his chest. We turned him over to see a look of sheer terror as the color drained from his chest. Immediately, a friend and I took turns administering chest compressions. There was nothing blocking his airway. It was all about letting the air in... and keeping his heart pumping until the EMTs arrived.

After several electric shocks, a flight to Oahu, and emergency surgery to clear a 95% blocked artery dubbed "the widow maker," Juan had been resurrected and was expected to make a full recovery. I was able to return a few months later for his 60th birthday. He was still moving slow as his heart was on the mend, but his mind was there.

He calls me his angelito, his little angel.

Seeing my friend die and then come back to life was nothing short of a miracle. Not everyone is as lucky to come back to life, but we are all yearning for that in some way. For those who are sick, they need healing. For those who have lost a job, they need employment. We all yearn to be brought back to life.

Bring Me to Life is an alternative rock song by the band Evanescence (and a good band name, if I do say so myself!), and speaks to the need for resurrection now:

*How can you see into my eyes,
like open doors
Leading you down into my core
Where I've become so numb
Without a soul
My spirit's sleeping somewhere cold
Until you find it there and lead it back home
Wake me up inside
Call my name and save me from the dark
Bid my blood to run
Before I come undone
Save me from the nothing I've become
[...]
Breathe into me and make me real*

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*Bring me to life.
[...]
Frozen inside without your touch
Without your love
Only you are the life among the dead*

In various parts of our lives, we need to be brought back to life. We know this all too well: the pain of death and destruction is real and happening now, and it freezes us from taking any action to save ourselves, let alone others.

We long to come alive, to break free from this pandemic, to avoid a world war in Europe, to simply be able to plan for more than a day in advance. The apocalypse is happening now, before our very eyes. And we need resurrection... now.

I was in Chicago this past week, and stepping out of the hotel to go to a restaurant or just get some fresh air, we ran into various people who were in need of food, shelter and more.

If someone is hungry, they don't need food later... they need food now.

If someone is homeless, they don't need housing later... they need housing now.

If someone is grieving, they don't need comfort later... they need comfort now.

The resurrection that Paul speaks of is not immortality. It is not about an immortal soul. He's talking about something else: SOMA. The Greek word for body, which meant the entire essence of the person... body, blood, heart and mind, therefore the transformation and rebirth of the entire person. "A new creation," if you will, as Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians. These are our bodies being resurrected. These our hearts stopping... and then beating again. I wonder what the early Christians thought of the resurrection. They needed saving, just like we do. And they needed it now, with people dying, disease running rampant, and destruction all around them.

That's what the Corinthians thought... it was going to be Resurrection Now... but it wasn't.

Paul is saying it's happening right now – the kingdom of God is here within and among you.

It's a Resurrection of the Heart.

We've lived long enough to have our hearts broken, to have them rent in two: a first love and breakup, a broken marriage, a friend's betrayal, a death of a loved one. Live long enough and we will experience a broken heart, a need for resurrection.

Resurrection isn't just about what happened 2,000 years ago or what will happen in the distant future. We need resurrection now.

Resurrection is about a new creation – create in me a new heart, O God.

Resurrection is about an awakening to faith – reawaken our faith in you, O God.

Resurrection is power over this world – power over sin and death.

All of this points toward a need for resurrection now, not later. We can talk about a visible, tangible event... but its significance is not what's happening up here (what we believe in our heads) but down here (what is happening in our hearts).

This past week in Chicago at our conference for Christian Educators, we heard a great story this weekend from Rev. Dr. Roger Nishioka, where a man in rural America is told that with the advent of broadband (and now 5G as it's rolled out nationwide), he will be able to talk with his grandkids, face to face – ok, screen to screen, - several hundred miles away. Incredulous, the man replies, “I’ll see it when I believe it.”

I’ll see it when I believe it.

You see, the heart is a stubborn and fickle thing. We can’t see things with our own eyes sometimes until we believe what we’re seeing. Jeremiah knows this, declaring, “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse — who can understand it?”

We know this as we are manipulated. All of our news and entertainment and media scrolling is designed to get us outraged, get us feeling strongly about this or that. We cannot only see but feel how the heart is perverse.

But it is the very sinful thing inside us that needs the resurrecting light of Christ. Our very hearts need resurrecting, time and time again, lest they stay frozen in fear inside us, as the song mentioned earlier.

For us to see again, we must believe again. And it starts not up here (head) but down here (heart). We need resurrection *now*... not back then, but here, now. Not over there, but within.

The in breaking of the Kingdom of God is here, now, within the Beloved Community.

The year of the Tiger is upon us. May we be bold and brave to declare our love for God and our love for one another. A love that resurrects each one of us. Here. Now. In this place. In this time.
Amen.