

**MOTIFS OF CRUCIFIXION:
RECAPITULATION
Genesis 3:1-7
Romans 5:12-14, 18; 6:3-4, 9-11**

A sermon by Larry R. Hayward on The Resurrection of the Lord, Easter Sunday in Lent, April 17, 2022, at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Alexandria, Virginia. This is the final in a lengthy, intermittent series entitled "Motifs of Crucifixion," drawn heavily from a book written by Reverend Fleming Rutledge.¹

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 3:1-7

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman,

'Did God say,

"You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?''

The woman said to the serpent,

'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said,

"You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."'

But the serpent said to the woman,

'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Romans 5:12-14, 18; 6:3-4, 9-11

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned...death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come...Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.

...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.

¹ Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015).

... 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.

One of the most beautiful sentences I have the privilege of reading from this pulpit comes from an opening prayer at funeral services.

Lord, we give you thanks that deep in the *human* heart is an unquenchable trust that life does not end with death, that the Father who made us will care for us beyond the bounds of vision even as he has cared for us in this earthly world.²

This prayer asserts that there is *universal trust* – “deep in the *human* heart.” Not simply the *religious* heart. Not the simply the *Christian* heart. But the *human* heart. No matter what religious faith we have or don’t have, no matter what degree of trust we place in reason or revelation, no matter our culture or country, our era or ethics, our source of identity given or chosen, “deep in the *human* heart” is a trust that “life does not end with death,” and that “the God who made us will care for us.” When we pray this prayer, we are expressing our deepest *trust*, shared throughout the human race.

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On Thursday of this week I received an email from Rabbi Jack Moline, who has been my friend for eighteen years and a friend of this congregation for even longer.

This is the third strange spring in a row [Jack began], saturated with bizarre weather, ridiculous politics, a demonic virus, [and an unexpected war we follow daily.]

It is hard to imagine where to find hope.

But then he added:

I will be looking for mine in the conversations during seder;

I wish *you* that same inspiration from the message of renewal that forms the foundation of your faith.

He continued:

But over the years I have come to place more and more stock in the power of *metaphor*.

So I wish us *liberation* and *resurrection* in whatever measure we need it; and, at least as important, reliable shelter, peace at home and abroad, and good health.

Deep in the human heart is an unquenchable trust that life does not end with death, that the Father who made us will care for us beyond the bounds of vision even as he has cared for us in this earthly world.

² The Book of Common Worship (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly: 1946), 211.

II.

The specific trust on which I want to focus this Easter grows out of the final of eight Motifs of the Crucifixion of Christ on which you have patiently listened to periodic sermons since September. This final motif is “*recapitulation*.” It simply means that

- In his Crucifixion and Resurrection, Jesus Christ re-lives the life and experience of the human race (symbolized by Adam) – from Creation at the hands of God in beauty and blessing through the Fall and its consequential aftermath.
- In his Crucifixion and Resurrection, Jesus Christ relives and overcomes all that has “gone wrong” in the history of the created order and all that has led to pain, suffering, death in our own personal histories as well.
- In the Crucifixion and Resurrection, Jesus Christ brings an entirely new reality into play, a realm or reign in which we and our world are able to *start over* as we await the return of the Lord in glory.

In the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, unquenchable trust in the *triumph* of God is met and exceeded.³

III.

Near the end of his life, the Apostle Paul focuses on this motif of recapitulation in the Letter to the Romans, the last and most dense of his letters. He does so by resurrecting – if you will – the Biblical character of Adam. Adam plays a major role at Creation in Genesis 1 and 2, but after the Fall in Genesis 3, disappears from the pages of the scripture until Paul brings him back in Romans.

Adam’s name simply means “the man” or “the human being.” Paul refers to him as a “type” – a symbol, a metaphor, a representative figure – for all humanity. In the character of Adam, we see what happens to the entire human race, generation to generation, individual to individual.

- Along with Eve Adam is “created in the image of God.”⁴
- Along with Eve, he is given responsibility (“dominion”) over all the creatures of the earth.⁵
- Together they are charged to be fruitful and multiply.⁶

And yet, along with Eve, Adam seeks to *exceed* the limits God has established for what it means to be human. Both he and Eve eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In taking such “forbidden fruit,” they enter a realm reserved *solely* for God. The Genesis narrator describes them as seeking to become “like God.”⁷

³ Rutledge 536-539.

⁴ Genesis 1:27.

⁵ Genesis 1:28.

⁶ Genesis 1:28.

⁷ Genesis 3:22.

It is that effort to *exceed* – to *go beyond* the limits of what it means to be human – that fractures the relationship between God and humanity,⁸ between humanity and nature,⁹ between human species and animal species,¹⁰ even between male and female.¹¹ We ironically refer to that overreach¹² as “The Fall.”

And it is that overreach – that Fall – that in the eyes of the Biblical narrative leads to the introduction into the world of *all* that from which we yearn to be free.

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Theologian Fleming Rutledge, writes: “Is there anyone alive over fifty [or younger] who would not want to live his or her life over again in order to

- Correct the mistakes
- Avoid the wrong turns
- Undo the damage
- Maximize the opportunities
- Recover the wasted time
- Repair the broken relationships
- Restore the lost future?¹³

Who among us wouldn’t want to reverse the tragedies that have befallen us, tragedies over which we have little control and to whose causes we have made no discernable contribution?

And who among us of *any* age would not wish to see the great wrongs wiped out:

- The racial injustice about which we continue to seek awareness
- Child abuse
- War crimes and genocide
- Despoiling of nature?¹⁴

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Yesterday I read a sermon by a young minister who is a friend of my stepdaughter. It was a sermon this minister preached on Good Friday at the funeral of his boyhood friend, who had taken his own life last Sunday. It was an excellent sermon on an un-excellent occasion. Who among us wouldn’t like to remove the need for such sermons, such occasions, and many others like them?

“...death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses [Paul wrote], even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam...”

⁸ Genesis 3:10.

⁹ Genesis 3:17-18.

¹⁰ Genesis 3:13.

¹¹ Genesis 3:12, 16.

¹² Notice that the motives of the woman in partaking of the fruit were noble and “reaching”: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:6)

¹³ Rutledge 537.

¹⁴ Rutledge 537.

IV.

Yet when Paul brings Adam back into scripture -- several millennia after his exit from the stage -- he brings him back as a *contrast* – a *foil* – to Jesus Christ, whose crucifixion and resurrection overcomes all that had been unleashed by Adam’s Fall.

*... just as one man’s trespass
led to condemnation for all [Paul wrote of Adam],
so one man’s act of righteousness
leads to justification and life for all [he adds of Christ].*

In Paul’s theological architecture, in the *crucifixion*, Jesus Christ re-lives all of human history subsequent to Adam’s Fall, absorbing that history of pain and tears into his own being; and through the *resurrection* Christ conquers the Fall, drawing us all into his *new* history, his *new* realm, his *new* reign.

*For just as by the one man’s disobedience
the many were made sinners,
so by the one man’s obedience
the many will be made righteous.*

Theologian J.N.D Kelly writes:

Because, *very God* as he is,
Christ has *identified himself* with the human race;
He has been able to act *on its behalf* and *in its stead*,
And the *victory* he has obtained
Is the victory of *all* who belong to him.¹⁵

Six hundred years earlier, John Donne prayed:

Looke, Lord, and finde both Adams met in me:
As the first Adam’s sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adam’s blood my soul embrace.¹⁶

IV.

At the funeral of his friend, the minister said:

The promise of Easter is that one day we will feast at the supper of the Lamb with [our departed friend.] We will gather at the Table anew when there will be no mourning and no crying.

“One day.” “One day we will feast.” “One day we will feast at the supper of the Lamb.” It is the “one day-ness” – the “here” but “not here” – character of Christ’s victory that makes our waiting for it both harder and more holy at the same time. It leads us to ask: “How do we respond to his victory in the present? What is our role *today, here, now?*”

¹⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 376-377; cited by Rutledge 537.

¹⁶ John Donne, “Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness,” cited in Rutledge 536.

In one simple sentence Paul writes:

*... just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
so we too might walk in newness of life.*

Christ has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. He lives “to God”¹⁷ [up here]. We walk in newness of life [down here].

We have an idea of what “newness of life” means for the world:

- No more war
- No more hunger
- No more violence or violation
- No more trafficking
- No more living on the streets
- No more addiction
- No more suicide
- No more mental illness
- No more endless suffering from physical disease
- No more hatred among tribe, race, nation, creed.

It is easy enough to name what “newness of life” means for the world. But only each of us, as a solitary individual – in the depth of our conscience, in the sacredness of our closest relationships, in the openness of our prayers, in the meditation on the scriptures and traditions of our community of faith – can be lead to the form that “newness of life” will take for us.

Our knowledge of that unique and tailor-made form of newness may still be unfolding. It may be unclear. We may be blocking it. But what we need to know about it is that it in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it has come into this life, into our world. It awaits our discovery of it, our recognition of it, our acceptance of it, our embrace of it. It awaits the first steps we take to begin walking its pathways all the days of our earthly life.

Whatever form it takes for each of us:

- It is something *new*.
- It is something that brings *life*.
- It is something that brings *us* life.
- And it is something that brings life to *the world*.

¹⁷ Paul adds this image in verse 10.

*Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
so we [like Christ] might walk
in newness of life.*

Amen.