

The Power of the Resurrection

Philippians 3:10

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We had friends in Ireland whose little daughter of seven caught pneumonia, and as the little girl Rosemary grew weaker and weaker, her mother prayed that she would be healed. Eventually, there came that night what the doctors warned the parents would be the last night for the little girl on earth, and 2:00 a.m. struck -- that hour that is probably for most of us the lowest hour in sickness -- and the mother just sank down in absolute weariness and feeling that she could no longer produce any strength that she could lend to her little daughter at all. And she and her father yielded up their little girl to God to do whatever he wanted with her and they gave her up as their possession and as anything that belonged to them. Then, they heard just a little gentle sigh and they looked up and the little girl had opened her eyes, and from that moment on she recovered and she is a schoolteacher, I think, in Ireland today.

But it is amazing, isn't it, how many of us who aren't even religious people have experienced the same kind of thing. Isn't it true that many of us who don't think of ourselves as religious at all, have experienced a turnaround, a complete turnaround in that crisis moment, that is due to some mysterious strength that seems to come from outside ourselves.

I mean, all the endurance experiences of explorers and of escaped prisoners of war are full of that mysterious life power that seems to come to them from outside of themselves. It seems to come to them when they are at the absolute end of their own resources. Massive surprising thing about it, isn't it? It seems it come to people when they've at last run out of their own strength, they have nothing more to give. I mean you must have read as I have read of explorers who have for days upon days driven and tried and fought the elements and again and again, until they reached the point where they felt they had nothing more to give themselves, and yet they kept on and on producing strength that they didn't know they possessed until they came to a place where they had nothing else left and they just sank down into unconsciousness and they yielded up their lives. And then there surges up, from hidden depths, a life power that surprises them --because it seems to come from beyond themselves and it seems to be actually more powerful than what they were able to produce themselves during the last few hours.

That's one of the surprising things about it, isn't it? It's like the wine that Jesus made at the party at the wedding in Cana. It was the last wine of all and should have been the poorest, but it surprises you by being actually stronger than the life that you are putting out at the beginning, and I think many of us have experienced that kind of power and we just cannot tell where it comes from.

Do you know where it comes from loved ones? Well, I'll show you if you look at a verse in the bible. It's Philippians 3:10.

Philippians 3:10, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection." It comes from the power of Jesus' resurrection. I mean, haven't you been in the same position yourself? Have you been in a crisis situation when your mother or your father have died, or a career situation that you've been working on for months suddenly falls apart, or a financial arrangement that you have been putting

yourself into planning for years just absolutely collapses, or a personal relationship that you have devoted a great part of your life to suddenly just ceases to exist and at last you feel a terrible weariness.

You just feel you have nothing more to give. You have no more ideas left, you have no more twists or turns to make and you just sink back and you give up any control over the situation you have and you just step right back from it and sit down -- and then it's strange. Things begin to come into a little order, circumstances begin to fall better than they were and you yourself experience a kind of fresh gentle breeze of life that seems to come from beyond yourself.

Loved ones, it comes from the power of Jesus' resurrection. You may say, "wait a minute, you yourself said that many of us experience this who aren't religious people at all. There are many of us who have experienced this but don't even believe in Jesus. Now, why do you say that what we're experiencing is the same kind of thing as this very religious person Paul was experiencing?"

Loved ones, first of all could we agree about the fact that this life power or this force that we experience at such times of crisis does seem to be different. Would you agree about that? It seems to come from beyond ourselves. Now, isn't it true that it's different from the kind of life that is produced by great emotion in a time of crisis? I mean we all know that.

You know, the father rushes out from the house as it bursts into flames and he just manages to get down the stairs, out through the door, and he falls to the ground exhausted and just glad that he is out of that inferno and he is weary and worn and has nothing more to give and then you remember somebody tells him that his little girl is still in her bedroom and emotion of affection rises up within him and drives him back into that house in order to rescue the girl.

Now, would you agree that the life power that we're talking about is different from that kind of thing? We all know that, but this life power that we're talking about is different in at least two ways. One, this life power comes after we have exercised our last efforts. It doesn't come indeed from our effort. As he goes back into the burning house because of exercising effort, because of the strength of his affection -- this life power that we're talking about comes when you have ceased to exercise your own effort. It comes from not exercising your effort, it comes from being in the place where you have no longer any effort to put forth. So it is different in that way.

Secondly, don't you agree it's different in that it's a quiet, gentle, strong, effectual power, which actually is able to touch things that we ourselves cannot touch with our efforts? So first of all I'd like you to agree that it is a power that is beyond us. It seems to be a supernatural rather than a natural power. Now, let's get back to the question, how come even non-religious people can experience the power of Jesus' resurrection? Well, loved ones it's easy and obvious, you know. Would you look at II Corinthians 5:14?

II Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all, therefore all have died", -- all, not only those of us who believe in Jesus, but all of us have died. That's everybody on earth, that's everybody who ever lived, has died with Jesus.

Do you see that Jesus' death was not just what it appeared to be, the death of a political victim, or the death of some idealistic teacher or the sacrificial death that was a bribe to God to forgive the Jews their sins -- but Jesus' death was the recreation of all of us human beings by our maker, the complete recreation of us, the destruction of us as weak little beings who would run out of

strength and the recreation of it in Jesus as part of a being who has infinite strength.

Now, you may say, "but you say recreation, but that verse there only talks about death." Yes, but loved ones the consequence of that is in Ephesians and maybe if you'd look at Ephesians 2:4-6.

Ephesians 2:4, "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." That's not just the Ephesians he's talking about, but he says all of us were dead, "made us alive" and it's past tense, "together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Every one of us has been resurrected in Jesus. There is a version of you and a version of me that dwells in Jesus at the Creator's right hand and that is the real you and that is the real me, and that real you has all the power of Jesus' life inside us. Now, if you say, "Well, how come, how come we only experience this at moments of distress or in moments of great hopelessness?" Because all the rest of the time we live as if we don't need it. All the rest of the time we live the great lie: the great lie is that you're not in Jesus, that you're on your own down in this world here and you'd better make what you can of your own life by your own power and your own effort. And your own life is your own to manage as you want and you have every right to do that and you can do what you want, when you want. We live that lie, loved ones. That is a lie, that is not true.

Final reality is what God has done to us all in Jesus: destroyed us all in him and raised us up in him. So that as a mother's womb is the method by which a little unborn child lives, so Jesus is the method by which you and I actually live. That is reality. But all of us live as if that isn't a reality and so the only time we ever fulfill the condition for that resurrection life to be manifested in us, is at times of absolute hopelessness. It's only in those moments that we fulfill the condition that is needed for the reality of our position and Jesus to be manifested, and that condition is absolute yielding up of our lives and our plans and our wishes to God. Now, do you see that?

See, it's amazing that God, in his great grace, at those rare moments, when all of us, (I know that this may upset some of us), but all of us -- Muslims, Hindus, -- whatever we are -- all of us who come to those moments when we see that we can't manage ourselves and we at last yield up the control of our lives and simply step back. At those moments God graciously gives us a hint and a sample of resurrection life by which he turns the dead winter ground into life and the dead winter trees into foliage and the dead winter plants into flowers and blossoms.

Loved ones, the power comes from the same mighty resurrection. It doesn't come from nowhere, it comes from Jesus' resurrection and many of us think "well, maybe it does, but still I have to live the way I live" and so, loved ones, you see what we do? We spend our time developing friendships and relationships to provide us with the love and esteem that we have already because of our position in Jesus and our Father's heart. So we develop these things not in order to show love -- that's why they are really here at all -- but we develop relationships with other people to provide the love and esteem which we have already because of our position in Jesus in our Father's heart.

It's the same with careers. We developed careers and financial situations and bank accounts not in order to assist God to subdue the world, but in order to provide ourselves with the security that we actually have already because we are in Jesus by God's mighty action. But we develop these other things to provide a substitute and actually a counterfeit for the security and the self-esteem that

we have because of our position in Jesus as part of His dear only son.

And so, because of that, we're always living in unreality and because we're still living in God's world, that unreal life that we're developing is bound to come for a moment to some points of frustration and futility. So we're bound to find that relationships have a real limitation, that finances have a real limitation in providing us with security, and it's at those rare moments when we come to points of futility and frustration that God is able to get through to us and make real to us the real resurrection life by which he intends us to live all the time.

In other words, it's only those rare moments, when he manages to get many of us to a point of yieldedness where we experience that effortless resurrection life that makes a daffodil grow. Ever seen a daffodil trying hard, or a tree? This is interesting, isn't it? The same kind of life that we experience in crises has the same effortlessness as those trees and flowers, and it gives us a clue that that is the way we're meant to live. That this other life that we are trying to produce is an artificial thing that continually ends up at these crisis moments. And you may say, "Oh, what do I do then? Do I do nothing? Is it passivity, is that what I need to do to experience this resurrection life everyday? Is that what it means to let go and let God?"

Well, certainly not with Jesus, was it? It certainly wasn't passivity with Jesus. I mean it was the very opposite. It seemed that he treated his Creator as his loving Father every day. It seemed that he spent his whole life in the context of that reality finding out what his Creator put him here to do. Trusting his Creator to give him the directions or the power to do it and then above all getting from his Creator day-by-day what other people were getting from each other. And then at the very end, actively cooperating with God and saying, "Into thy hands I commit my Spirit." Certainly in Jesus' life it wasn't passivity, it was a life lived in the midst of the reality that he was part of his Creator's family and that his Creator loved him as a Father. That's what it means, loved ones.

It means identification with Jesus. That's the way to experience resurrection life everyday. Total identification with Jesus in his attitude to our Creator, treating him not as some being beyond the sky, but as a dear Father who loves you, who knows your name, who has counted the hairs of your head and has put you here for a purpose. And he is not going to step back and leave you on your own. It means believing that and living like that and refusing to cut the legs out from other people in order to preserve yourself, but trusting that living the way his Father wants you to will enable him to protect you in a way that you cannot protect yourself.

Do you know how many alcoholics have moments of sobriety? Do you know that there are many? That there are many alcoholics that have moments of sobriety when they are dry for a week or two weeks? Do you know that those moments are given to them, to let them see what life can be like? And you know how many of them slept back into the squalor in the drunkenness?

Now, loved ones, those moments that you have experienced, whether you are religious or not, those are rare moments that the Creator has given to you to show you what life can be like all the time. If you yield the control of your life to him, and begin to treat him as your Father. But do you realize that this is yet another Easter? Yet another year has gone past from last Easter and you have to choose whether those moments are going to be rare interludes in your life or whether they are going to be the establishment of reality in your relationship with your God, you have to decide.

This real decision, you know, you can make today. You have to choose today whether Easter is a rare

occurrence in your life or whether it is your everyday normal experience. And honestly, the decision will be made immediately after this service. Immediately after this service, you either go right back to hacking it through on your own and clearing them out of the way, or you look up to that dear person who made you. You know you didn't make your own hands, you know your mom didn't make your hands, you know that fine well. You know that they came from somewhere else. You know that's the only thing that makes any sense. Or you look up to that person and you say, "I am sorry. This has been ridiculous. I believe in you, my Father, and I am going to trust you as my Father and I am at least going to start walking my life in partnership with you and thank you, thank you, for all your patience with me."

Loved ones, you have to decide whether to do that or not. I do pray, I do pray that, and I mean that honestly. I do pray that you will decide to live in reality, this day.

"Dear Father, we do see that these things have not come about by chance. It's just an impossible myth to believe that these things came about by their own power. We do sense that you're there and Father we're often put off by the religious people who speak up for you but we see that we can't throw away reality just because of poor examples. Father we see that you've given us plenty of evidence here and evidence in our own experience of resurrection life and there's a feeling we've had at those moments but this is really living. It's a feeling our Father we've had that this is life.

At those moments that have been the worst in our lives, we've sensed almost an exhilaration, and then because the life seems to be strong and seems to be invincible, Father we see that that's the way we're meant to live, every day -- and that what you want is for us to yield our lives and our plans up to you now when we are not pressured, to yield them up of our own free will and to begin to be the person and the child that you have made us to be. Father we'd start -- however weakly -- we'd start today. We'd begin to ask you what you want us to do in our lives, what you put us here for and Lord we'd begin to exist in Jesus and believe that we have been put into him by you and we are a part of him, and to live the way he lives for your glory. Amen