

I was having an email conversation with a friend the other day. We are having more and more of these digital conversations in these days of social isolation and imposed Sabbath. He and I were talking about reasons to remain in a particularly difficult situation when walking away would just be so much less stressful, and so much easier. I countered the idea of walking away with the idea of remaining in place in order to fight for a more worthy outcome in the future that would not be realized if we abandoned the effort in the present.

My friend's response was illuminating. He wrote, "What you have said to me is that there is a socially redeeming unicorn awaiting down the road for which we should put up with abuse and insults until that unicorn presents itself at which point all will be good." He summarized by saying, "That is soul devouring."

Soul devouring unicorns. That is how people often feel when Christians present the resurrection of Jesus as simply God's guarantee that someday everything is going to get better. You might die, but don't worry, if you have faith, it'll be alright.

Now, don't get me wrong, those facts are truth. On account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, you can be certain that every promise God made to those who put their faith in Christ will most certainly, absolutely be completely realized when, at some point in the future, we he raises from the dead the bodies of all who put their faith in Him.

Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Because Christ died on the cross on our behalf, for our sins; because Jesus Christ the Son of God took upon Himself both the sins of the whole world and the punishment those sins deserve; because He offered Himself an innocent sacrifice for the sins of the world and suffered the death all sin deserves, God, accepting the validity of His sacrifice raised Him from the dead. He put death to death! And because God accepts the blood of Jesus on our behalf, and proved His acceptance by raising Jesus from the dead, we can be absolutely certain the bodily resurrection and eternal life Jesus promised will one day be ours.

And there's that pesky unicorn named "Someday." That metaphorical beast is the same one Martha identifies in her conversation with Jesus. Her brother Lazarus, Jesus' dear friend was sick and dying and she sent word to Jesus, but Jesus held back, maintained his intentional social distance, and Lazarus died. He'd been in the tomb four days before Jesus arrived on the scene.

Jews from Jerusalem and Bethany and the surrounding area gathered at the home Martha and Mary, her sister, had shared with Lazarus. They were there to share in the grief. Martha must have learned from one the mourners coming and going that Jesus was approaching the village. She went out to meet Him.

Now, we ought to take a moment and grasp a spiritual truth here. Sometimes, when we are in the

midst of difficult, dark, lonely, painful circumstances, we need to just go out and find Jesus. We need to leave the grief, the anxiety, the concern, and just go out and find Jesus.

Her words to Him could sound like an accusation, but given the nature of their relationship, I think they are a statement of faith. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” That’s faith right there. “Lord, I know if you had been here, if you had seen the situation with your own eyes, you would have taken charge of that sickness and you would have spoken the healing words of the Creator over Him, just like you did for others, and that deadly disease would have given up its hold on him, and you would have made him well. But you weren’t here, and I know you can do something, I just don’t know what, but whatever you ask of God, He’ll give it.”

She has an open heart. Her heart is wounded and broken by the death of her brother. Her spirit is grieved by a power she cannot defeat. Her mind is searching for answers but not sure there is one. She only knows that if there is any hope at all in her situation, Jesus is that hope.

John tells us that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Love doesn’t play games with someone else’s heart. Jesus said to Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” I wonder if Martha were responding to Jesus in our day if she would have used the same language my friend used, “Jesus, I love you, but don’t give me that unicorn.” I don’t know, but I do know what she said to Jesus is the verbal parallel. “I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.”

Yes, Jesus, I am certain that on that future day, when God makes everything right and establishes His kingdom on the earth and the lion lays down with the Lamb and the nations beat their swords into plowshares and the infant puts his hand in the serpent’s lair that everything will be alright, and my brother will live again.” In the meantime, Lazarus is dead and Martha is broken hearted.

I think Jesus knows, in fact, I am certain He knows what Martha’s response implies. I think He knew she had faith for the future, and what she really needed was faith for the present. I think Jesus knew what we all need to know, “How does the resurrection help me in the present moment, with my present pain, in my present difficulty, for my present need.

Today we stand and look into the empty tomb, and we hear the promise of God for a bright and glorious future, and we take it to heart. We don’t dismiss His goodwill toward us and the mercy He is working to bring us into eternal fellowship with Himself, a fellowship and love we would never choose, that He alone must work in us as an expression of His sovereign love and grace. We don’t doubt His intention, but in our brokenness, in our pain, in our distress and uncertainty, we are not asking God what the resurrection of Jesus means for our future, we are asking God what the resurrection of Jesus means for us today, in this moment.

The question of the hour is not whether the resurrection the divinity of Jesus. We know that. We are not wondering whether the resurrection of Jesus is the crowing climax of God’s love for us. We believe what Paul wrote, that “God commends His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” We are not questioning whether the resurrection of Jesus sealed God’s plan of salvation which He put in place before He ever created the world. We are

confident of that.

What we want to know is what impact does the resurrection of Jesus have when I'm stuck at home and can't live life as usual because of social actions being taken on account of a new virus in the world. What we want to know is how does the resurrection of Jesus help us in relationships that have hit a difficult spot and we don't know how to move forward. What we want to know is what difference does the resurrection of Jesus make when we are out of work, out of food, out of hope, and out of excuses. What we want to know is why are we celebrating someday when today is so hard.

Listen to what Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." It is easy to think that Jesus simply means that He is the powerful One, the God of Life and death, who will one day raise the dead and give them life. While that is true, that's not what He means. Jesus explains what He means by what He does next.

Mary joins the scene. She makes the same faith statement Martha does about what would have been possible had Jesus been present and then they head to the tomb. Jesus, deeply moved at all this is transpiring, commands them to remove the stone. There is some hesitancy, but the boulder sealing the tomb is removed. Jesus prays. He makes sure the attention of the gathered witnesses is focused on the Father and on the relationship He Himself has with the Father, and then, with three words, Jesus brings the resurrection to bear on the situation.

"Lazarus, come forth." And that is exactly what Lazarus does, burial shroud and all. Jesus has not yet died on the cross and experienced His own resurrection, but using the situation of Lazarus Jesus reveals that He is the one who, applying resurrection power, brings new life in the present. Lazarus is raised by the resurrecting power of Jesus to new life, not in the someday, but in the present.

What Jesus did physically for Lazarus in that moment is what Paul describes as the result of faith in Christ for all believers. **Romans 6:4 (ESV)** *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

The resurrection is more than just a promise of future glory for those who believe. It is the evidence of the power of God to enable the believer to enter into and live a new life in the present, not the old life of sin and selfishness, but the new life of love and devotion and holiness and obedience that Christ Himself lived in the world by the power of the Spirit.

**The resurrection of Jesus promises eternal life through faith in Him but also transforms earthly living by the power of His resurrection at work in us now.** How? How does that work? How does the resurrection of Jesus from the dead in the past impact my life, your life in the present? Let me take us to two verses, both in First Peter, that will help us see the answer to that question.

The first verse is **1 Peter 1:3 (ESV):** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

***According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.***

God, acting according to His sovereign plan, calls sinners to repentance, and gives them the faith to believe the gospel. Along with this work of the Holy Spirit God gives the one He calls a new heart, a new spirit, a new life. This is what the Bible calls being born again. That new heart and new life replace the spiritual deadness that was our spiritual condition from birth. Paul puts it like this, ***If anyone is in Christ [if anyone believes and puts their faith in Christ and is saved by the grace of God], he is new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.*** This transformation is possible on account of the resurrection of Jesus.

You can live with a new hope. You can make decisions with a new outlook. You can build relationships with a new foundation. You can handle crisis with a new confidence. You can confront challenges with a new understanding. You can love with a new enthusiasm. Why? Because God responds to faith in Christ with newness of life which is possible because of the resurrection of Jesus.

Because Jesus lived the perfect life of love and obedience God requires of every human being, after He was crucified on our behalf, God raised Him from the dead. God now forgives every sin and restores every heart of those who put their faith in Christ, who trust that God's plan to offer His Son in their place was certified by God's raising Jesus from the dead.

***He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*** Not a dead hope, but a living hope. Not a life someday hope, but a life now hope. Not a life maybe hope, but a life certainly hope. On account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead you and I can have a brand new life right now.

The second verse I want to point you to this morning, as we answer the question how God transforms our earthly lives in the moment through the resurrection of Jesus is **1 Peter 3:21 (ESV): *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*** Baptism makes an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter's thoughts on baptism are a discussion for another time. What I want you to see is that an appeal is made to God for a good conscience, which, if provided, would come through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The conscience is the God-created, God-defined internal component of each human person that guides their moral decision making. It is the means by which we inherently know right from wrong. And folks, you know as well as I do that over the course of life, our conscience takes a beating. Human beings take to sin like a fish to water. We are born for it, and yet, every sin, every wicked intent, every evil action, every selfish bent weighs upon the conscience an increasing burden of guilt and shame. We may be naturals at sinning but sin is no friend to our nature.

When we come to faith in Jesus, God extends His forgiveness of our sin and guilt. He erases our

shame. He cleanses our conscience. He does this through the resurrection of Jesus, the living proof that Jesus took all of our sin and guilt and nailed them to the cross. The resurrection is the infinite testimony that the ordinance that was written against us, the charges God held against us on account of our sin have been successfully removed and dealt with in the death of His Son.

Through the resurrection of Jesus God offers a good conscience, a clean conscience in exchange for our old beleaguered, sin-weary conscience. And let me tell you, when you are no longer living under a burden of guilt and shame, hoping no one ever finds out your deepest darkest secrets, it's a whole new world. And God offers just such a good conscience to you through the resurrection of Jesus.

**The resurrection of Jesus promises eternal life through faith in Him but also transforms earthly living by the power of His resurrection at work in us now.**

On this resurrection Sunday morning, God offers not some pie in the sky, all's well in the by and by, someday, somewhere unicorn. God offers each of us today a new life, a new heart, a new spirit, and a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus, that will transform the lives we live in the present.

Will you trust the risen Christ today? Will you trust God to honor the statement, the commitment He made when He raised Christ from the dead? Ask Him for a new life now. Ask Him for a good conscience now. And trust Him both now, and forever.