

Our journey through Lent to Easter calls for more than imaginative role-playing.

# Waking Up to the RESURRECTION

RENEE FRANZEN

I am getting better at anticipating the resurrection. But first I have to unlearn some things.

I was educated in the sixties and seventies, a time when convention was thrown out the window and creativity was king. The education field had just discovered the valuable tool of role-play. In high-school social studies class when we were learning about the judicial system we acted out the parts of the trial, taking the role of the accused, the defense, or the prosecution, or being cast in the role of jury or all-important judge. When we studied government, we drafted bills and tried to get them passed as other classmates played the roles of defeating or amending them. It was a very hands-on and successful way to learn.

When I moved on to my liberal arts studies in college and majored in the social sciences, again the role-playing. In my master's program in psychology/counseling we practiced the role of the compassionate listener, the frantic client, the therapist with the combatant couple—role-playing to bring resolution, acting out positive outcomes and hopeful endings.

Even in job interviews I was asked

to role-play how I would handle various situations I was likely to face working with the incarcerated juveniles or the complexities of a family in turmoil. Apparently I had learned my lessons well, because when I was hired for those positions it was my role-playing that helped convince the interviewers that I understood what the jobs might require. They commented that I could “demonstrate competency.” It looked to them like I could think on my feet, or engage in difficult relationship interventions with some level of helpfulness.

A helpful tool, role-playing. But not so helpful in my spiritual life. Not so useful in the call to discipleship. I cannot *act* my way into the kingdom. I cannot demonstrate through technique what a faithful life committed to Christ looks like, then turn it off when no one is watching. God does not approach me with scripts or hypothetical possibilities to see how I might demonstrate obedience. He does not ask me to imagine the lost and come up with a clever guise of rescue. Instead, he says, “Follow me,” and sends us into the real world with real hearts and real opposition. In my response to his invitation to become a

follower, role-playing seems to get in my way, and in God's way too. I have had to unlearn this approach.

When Isaiah the prophet mourned over the condition of the people, it was due in part to a role-playing problem on their part. They were making their sacrifices, even observing the fast days, but these practices left their *hearts*, their desire to be in real covenant, out of the equation. They were role-playing, and God lamented, “These people come near me with their mouth...but their hearts are far from me” (29:13). In my faith walk it is possible for me to say all the right things and be in the right places but still have my heart shut up somewhere deep inside, where it is free to do its own thing, free to avoid transformation. Time and time again, and especially through the season of Lent, God calls me on the carpet and asks for repentance, *real heartfelt repentance*. And when I do so, God responds by making my heart more accessible to him, more malleable. He molds it, changes its shape, gives it ears that hear and eyes that see. He changes my heart. It is like waking up!

So I have learned to anticipate the resurrection. Not the resurrection of



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my youth, when I mistakenly thought that we role-played our way through Holy Week. We acted confused on Thursday when Jesus took the towel and washed the disciples' feet. We acted bereft on Friday because Jesus was arrested and tried and betrayed and murdered. (I never knew *what* we were suppose to act like on Saturday.) On Sunday we celebrated, and we really did celebrate that he had arisen.

I loved Easter! The church service was always the same. In my childhood the church was full, and when the basses sang with gusto that ascending line "up from the grave he arose," I could imagine the earth shaking and opening up. The sopranos let it soar on those high notes, and the choir director held his arm still in the air high above all our heads so we sang, "He arose" (*hold that note, now louder still!*), "He arose! Hallelujah, Christ arose!" I never doubted it for a minute. Jesus was alive!

*Anticipating the resurrection* is bringing that celebration out of its Easter box and into the everyday of my life. Resurrection means that death is vanquished, but it also means that death and sorrow are real and

fierce and every funeral I attend gives witness to that. Something deeply mysterious, deeply *spiritual* happened when Jesus Christ challenged the powers of hell. Not only did he secure our salvation, he secured hope and power and indwelling by his Spirit. That would become the way his followers would forever be able to complete the tasks he left to us.

*Anticipating the resurrection* means that when I sit with a hostile couple in a tense marriage counseling hour, I can truly believe, not just imagine, that hope and healing are possible in the here and now. *Anticipating the resurrection* means that despair and opposition are a real part of the story, but not the whole of it. They cannot have the final word.

*Anticipating the resurrection* means that when I pray I know I am doing some kind of heavenly battle that has immediate and real consequences here on earth. *Anticipating the resurrection* means that when God calls me to act in just, compassionate, or merciful ways I do so with the living power of the living Christ

advising, participating, and changing what happens when I engage.

*Anticipating the resurrection* means that when I preach I can know that the words I speak are the words God would share with his people and

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that they come through his living word and his loving heart. *Anticipating the resurrection* means that there are times when I sit with his open word in my lap and know with every fiber of my being that he has just whispered some powerful word of

love or comfort or insight or idea that will be kissed with his blessing.

I am getting better at carrying Easter with me in my back pocket. I am getting better at remembering that Jesus not only was raised from the dead but that he now sits at the right hand of God and I am now seated with him too. That last part, the part about being seated with him? Understanding that is going to take some more practice. ■

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