

Resurrection

By Rick Wakefield

When I was growing up, I was raised in a liberal Protestant church. Now I did not have a problem with Christianity, though miracles I had a difficult time with. I also had a problem with the meaning of resurrection.

Many, many years ago, as a lad back in Pittsfield, I remember sitting in church one Easter Sunday. The minister was giving the Easter sermon. Front and center in the church there was a plain dark brown wooden cross hanging there. The minister was going on about what the cross meant. He pointed out that the cross in our church the cross was empty because HE WAS RISEN, HE WAS GONE, HE WAS NOT THERE. Now, he said, there are *some* churches that show Jesus still hanging on the cross and well, they just plain missed the point. What was important was that he was risen and not still hanging on the cross.

My friend Paul Campbell grew up Catholic in Dorchester. One day I told him that story and he told me a story about an Easter Sunday where the Priest's homily involved the fact that the Catholic church buildings had crosses at the top, and those *other* churches has wind vanes and THAT was the difference between Catholics and those other churches. So not only do the Gospels themselves tell different stories and have different ending points. Various Christian churches cannot agree on what it means either.

I would like to talk about the subject of resurrection. Not THE resurrection, which occurred on the first Easter Sunday over 2,000 years ago, but what I have come to believe resurrection, is really about. Rather than a subject reserved for a Messiah, or a promised life after death, I believe that we, as humans, have the opportunity to be resurrected, to have our lives changed in an significant and powerful way. I believe that because in my life I have undergone such an experience.

As early as 4th grade, I had an inkling that my brain functioned in a way that the other kids brains did not. Looking back some 35 some odd years what I had was obviously AD/HD. 35 years ago there was no such thing as AD/HD, so I was an underachiever, a space shot, a day dreamer. I did not work up to my potential, and needed to buckle down. This went on through primary school, high school, college, graduate school and even currently in my professional life.

There was always a feeling conveyed to me that in some way shape or form, that not only was I letting myself down, but also others. I came to believe that there must some switch I could flip on or off and I just had to find that switch and flip it. I never did though.

Since 4th grade, I began to have depressive episodes, which would follow me the rest of my life. Again back in the day they did not believe that kids in junior high or high school got depressed. I learned to get out of bed in the morning, shower, put on my pants and do what had to be done such as going to school or work. Woody Allen has said that 90% of life is showing up; I became the expert at showing up. I carried the AD/HD and depression through my adult life.

Janet's brother was diagnosed with cancer early in the 90's and passed away in 1998. Prior to this no one who I knew well, either family or friend had passed away. Two years later in 2000 my brother was diagnosed with cancer and passed away only 8 months later. Not only was I with him, I was holding him.

After that August I began a slow spiral down. My brother's death, trying to raise a family, trying to be married, being stuck in a dead end job from which I could find no escape, all slowly began dragging me down.

In the spring of 2001, in spite of seeing a shrink, I was in the darkest place in my life. A deep, dark, soul sucking, emotional black-hole. People always have advice for such times: pray, meditate, relaxation tapes, exercise more, get more sunshine, see more rainbows, all of which are worthy pursuits, but none of which could arrest my mental anguish.

Early in June 2001, I wasn't sleeping, regularly forgot to eat, had at least one good juicy panic attack a day and found it impossible to work. The shrink I had at the time later told me later that she just did not see it, I did not present as a typical depressive, I showered, held down a job, had a family.

What it was she did not see was my major depressive mental meltdown. One which, on June 6, 2001, had me checking into Unit 36, the adult psych ward at Norwood hospital, where I spent 4 of the next 6 weeks.

Let's be honest here, there are two groups for which mental illness is either expected or is perhaps a badge of passage. Every day on my way to the train, I pass the NE shelter for homeless veterans. There one sees mental illness played out on the stage of the street: anger, drug use, obscene verbal outbursts.

Then there is the other group, the rich and famous. The news is littered with the lives of those who grew up too fast or too soon; those who cannot continually measure up to the expectations. We know the names: Lohan, Spears, Belushi. We almost expect that every week a star will enter rehab or will have a very public meltdown.

For me though, your average middle of the road whack job, or for most average people in this or any other community to give into or admit mental illness, is considered suicide without necessarily taking one's life.

Steve Antoinini, a state senator from the Worcester, lived this very predicament. A life long depressive, he had a brother who committed suicide. Yet did not seek help, until an aide found him in his office, unable to stop crying; when he finally did get help he paid for his psychiatry visits and medication with cash, lest it show up on his insurance records. He went to a CVS in a different town, lest anyone he know, see him buying the medication.

He went public with his battle with depression in March 2006, when he did a television ad for the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

Examine your own feelings on the subject. Even though there is a claim that the stigma of mental illness is “gone”, how many would publicly or privately admit that you were suffering from a mental illness? If I were to grab this congregation by the ankles and shake, more that one prescription bottle of paxil, ativan, wellbutrin, Zoloft or other medication for the treatment of mental ‘issues’ would fall to the floor. How would you couch the reasons why you had it: takes the edge off, trouble sleeping, calms my nerves.

Many live in the fear that someone will find out. Many deny that they need help because they would have to admit to having a mental issue. Many refuse to seek help because they think that it is some kind of personal weakness or failure to seek help.

The only reason I am telling you this story, is that during a job evaluation my boss tried the fact that I am being treated and take medication, as a reason for what he perceived as my poor performance. Would he have said to a woman that her poor performance was due to an X-Y chromosome. I had to get a lawyer, write letters, deal with HR and the civil rights officer.

There is a true fear of mental illness or the fear of those who are mentally ill. That existed in 2001 and exists now. When I checked myself in, I gladly surrendered all of the trappings of a normal life. The patient rooms had no TVs or phones. The only decoration in the room was a crucifix that was covered by hard plastic and bolted to the wall. I had my belt and shoes taken away.

There is a nurse on the floor whose job it is to carry a clipboard with every patients name on it and does checks. When you first get in you are on suicide watch and the nurse has to see or check you every 5 minutes. After you have been evaluated, that may drop to every 10 minutes or twenty minutes, day or night sleeping or awake. . It is from this point that you hope to start your recovery.

I shared a room with a man named Mark. Mark was from Brockton, was approximately my age. He was homeless and claimed he was living in a shack he and a buddy had built in the woods of DW Field Park. He was probably a drug abuser. No one visited him, no body called him.

I had visitors and phone calls, I got out on pass, first for only an hour and accompanied by Janet. Over the next few days, it became a couple of hours, then an afternoon. I still had to return by 8

every night lest I turn into a pumpkin. Mark was finally able to leave after about two weeks, released to a homeless shelter in Boston.

With the support of family and friends and a supportive boss, I was able to return to work part-time in September 2001, and full time in January 2002. The past six years has been filled with a lot of ups and downs. Two years ago and more than a few docs, I found a doctor who I see every 2 or 4 weeks. With his help and the patience of my immediate family I have reached a point where my life is better than I ever could have imagined.

The AD/HD is controlled, the cloud of depression has been lifted. Not that I do not get down and frustrated, I do know that it is only a temporary thing now. I count myself as lucky and very fortunate. I have a life I would now trade for no other, and love, and never dreamed I could have had.

In January 2002, after I returned to work full-time, I had walked over Beacon Hill on my way to South Station. It was kind of a miserable cold drizzly evening. I was going to cut under the overhang at Jordan Marsh, it was still Jordan Marsh then I think. Up at the other end of the overhang, I saw a familiar face and as I got closer I realized it was my old roommate from the hospital, Mark. He was begging change. It turns out he was living in St. Francis house. He told me he was getting depressed again.

I saw him once more after that, but since that time, I looked for him many times and searched, but never saw him again.

I remember reading a story in the Reader's Digest, a drama in real life thing. A man told the story of how he had become so despondent, he decided to take his own life. He went to the Golden Gate Bridge and jumped. He hit the water and decided that suicide was a bad idea. To save himself, he managed to get to one of the pillars of the bridge and desperately clinging to it found a crack and a little nub of concrete and was able to onto long enough to get rescued.

I look at my life now and know that my family of Janet and my children, was the nub of concrete that allowed me to hang on and my extended family of relatives and friends and decent insurance which helped me recover.

But very frequently, I think of Mark. Why did I get something to hang onto and he didn't. I was no better or worse a person than he. I am inherently no more or less worthy than he. At this point I realize that there is no answer to the question. What I do realize is that I got a new life, a resurrected life.

I firmly believe is that it is a gift available to any of us, in this lifetime.