



- Antoine Josse

on resurrection

Robert Steiner

Scripture Reading: Mark 16:1-8

It was the Protestant reformer Martin Luther who once said: "Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime."

In other words, not only holy scriptures, but nature itself witnesses to the hope of new life. All we need to do is, to become more attentive and aware to nature's rhythms and cycles. It is along those lines that the poet Mary Oliver once said: "The real prayers are not the words, but the attention that comes first."

Poets and artists know about the gift of attentiveness and the wonderful calling of turning one's observations into tender strokes of words and lines that try to capture something of the mystery of life. But there are so many ways that one could draw such a line in springtime. And each drawing would bring forth

another aspect of this promise of resurrection.

I have been told that fundamentally there are four different kinds of lines, one could use to draw a leaf in springtime:

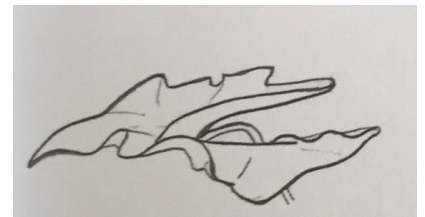
- A "bold" line.
- A „broken" or "repeated" line.
- A "pure" line.
- A "lost-and-found" line.

(The following images are from: *Drawing on the right side of the brain*, Betty Edwards, pg. 25)

There are so many ways to draw a leaf. And there are so many ways to talk about the promise of resurrection. I believe that each individual line quality is able to give expression to a particular aspect of the promise of resurrection. For the individual resurrection stories in our Gospels are as distinct and

unique as the different line qualities of a leaf.

The "bold" line



There is a wonderful boldness and confidence in some of the resurrection scenes: We read about an earth quake and a massive stone that has been rolled away. We are invited to look into the darkness of the tomb and discover an empty grave. Bold lines that speak of a dramatic, unique event. A disruption of physical laws. A breaking in of a wholly other reality. Sometimes you need "to say it loud and clear, for the whole wide world to hear." Just like in the African-American spiritual "The angel rolled the stone away."

The "repeated" line



The "repeated" line is "the line that repeats itself". The Greek word used to describe Jesus' resurrection is the same word that is used to describe the result of some of his healing actions. Again and again we read about people being sick or paralyzed, but because of Jesus's compassion and care being able to rise from their beds and embrace a new life. It is because of this repetition of the same word and line that every healing story can be viewed as a small resurrection story and that the resurrection story becomes one big healing story. The „repeated“ line does not speak to us of resurrection as a dramatic and unique event. It rather emphasizes that the promise of resurrection is always with us, can already be experienced in those moments that we are getting back onto our feet. There are layers, echoes, a continuity and repetition of the promise that runs through our whole life.

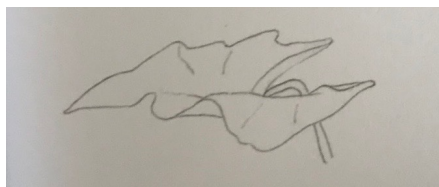
Such repetition and echoing can also be found in many of the African-American spirituals. When the slaves

working in the fields sang "Swing low, sweet chariot", they were not only dreaming about the day of resurrection, when the chariot would come to fetch them and carry them across the river Jordan to the promised land. It was more concretely also the chariot that would wait at midnight, at a secret meeting place, under a certain tree, to take them from the South to the North, to a place of freedom and safety. To sing swing low is to believe that every moment of liberation is a small resurrection, and resurrection is one big liberation story. The poet Hailey Gaunt beautifully expressed such hope when she writes in her poem "Morning Walk":

*I want to shed my clothes,
shoes,
my life on legs,
throw my body back,
leave the whole shell of it
behind*

*shoot across the wave in one
wet line.*

The "pure" line

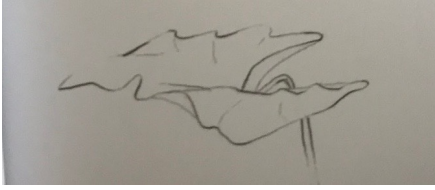


It is thin and precise. It allows for detail. It is soft and delicate and conveys a tenderness and vulnerability, that makes room

for doubt and uncertainty. Resurrection not shouted from the rooftops, but rather whispered from ear to ear. (Henri Nouwen)

This „pure“ line of tenderness and vulnerability is for me most beautifully reflected in the story of doubting Thomas. Jesus shows Thomas his wounded hands and side. It is a delicate and vulnerable love which gives Thomas the certainty that the crucified Christ is the risen Christ. It is when we make ourselves vulnerable to each other, that we become real to each other. And resurrection is not a „delete“ button, in the sense that who we are and what we have experienced is simply wiped out. The risen Christ is scarred and known by his scars. We too, though transformed and transfigured, clothed again with a new body, will always be known by both the joy and the suffering that comes with being a human being. Such vulnerability and tenderness is beautifully expressed in the Spiritual "Nobody knows the trouble I have seen." The song cherishes the intimate friendship with Jesus as „the wounded healer“ (Henri Nouwen).

The "lost-and-found" line



It is a line that "starts out dark, fades away, then becomes dark again." So much is left to our imagination. There are gaps, that our eyes and mind complete in their own time, and in their own way. There is enough there to see the whole, enough to sense the enormity of the event.

Lost and found. The risen Christ meets his disciples as a gardener, a stranger on the road, and an unknown guest at the shore of Galilee. He is not immediately recognized. There is a delay in seeing, and in between, a journey of first being lost and only then finally being found. There is always a decisive turning point, when the veil is lifted: When he calls Mary of Magdala by name, when he breaks the bread with the disciples he met on the road to Emmaus, when he meets Peter at the Sea of Galilee and encourages him to throw the net to the others side. „Lost-and-found“ lines speak of "deep memory" which creates "abundant hope" in the presence (Walter Brueggemann). When someone calls us by name, when someone breaks bread with us,

when someone cares and shows compassion... moments that can bring back profound memories and reassure us that we are not alone.

The original ending of Mark's Gospel also reveals such a „lost-and-found“ line: "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." Let's not forget that the first witnesses of the resurrection were initially also lost, terrified and confused. What an unusual ending for a Gospel, for a story that intends to tell Good News! „They said nothing to anyone.“ Their fear, uncertainty, and silence speaks of fading lines, of blanks, in need of interpretation, of disruption, disconnection, in need of imagination and poetry. Endings matter! But what if they are fading into an emptiness? Will our eyes, our mind, our trust in the God of love be able to fill the gaps, to complete the line, to bring it back, from being lost to being found again? I think we can, but only when we begin to concede that to embrace life can at times be much more difficult than to embrace death. Mark's original ending resonates with the old hymn "Amazing grace", often sung at funeral services, giving expression to resurrection as the moment when the line is found again,

becomes dark again. Every instance of being found is a small resurrection, and resurrection in turn becomes one big, final homecoming.