

Hope & Resurrection

March 20, 2011

Here we are at the beginning of spring, and I just feel so hopeful!

I don't know about you, but I have three beginnings in every year: January 1 (for obvious reasons), the start of spring (because I can't wait to get outside and start some projects after a long winter), and right after Labor Day (the traditional beginning of the school year).

That makes three opportunities to begin again or to start something new.

In the Christian calendar we've recently begun the season of Lent, which as you may know is a season of sacrificing. As a kid I'd give up dessert or some other fun thing, which I hated doing. Lent is followed by remembering Christ's death on the cross and the joy of His resurrection three days later.

Whether or not you actually believe Christ rose from the dead, the idea of resurrection and renewal is an extremely important concept that is inherent in being human, because it's the idea of HOPE. In the New Testament, in 1 Peter 1:3, Peter calls renewal and hope the same thing -- they're interchangeable -- when he says "Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

It's not just in the Christian texts that hope and renewal go hand in hand. In the Qu'ran it's written, "And never give up hope of Allah's soothing Mercy: Truly no one despairs of Allah's soothing Mercy except those who have no faith." (12:87). The Bhagavad-Gita, the Old Testament, The Tibetan Book of the Dead, texts of the Baha'i faith -- all refer to the hope that comes along with rebirth or renewal.

When I was a little girl, my parents had a book of Greek myths, and included in these was the story of Pandora.

Pandora was, according to the story I read (though there are many versions of the ending), the first woman on Earth and she was created as a punishment to humankind. Zeus wanted to punish humans because Prometheus had stolen fire from the gods and given it to them. Pandora was created by the gods, each one of whom gave her a gift (beauty, curiosity, stubbornness, crafts).

She was also given a box or a jar containing special gifts, which the gods told her never to open. Hermes took her to marry Epimetheus, who was the brother of Prometheus. Prometheus had advised his brother not to accept anything from the gods, but Epimetheus saw Pandora and was astonished by her beauty and he accepted her right away.

Pandora was trying to tame her curiosity, but at the end she could not help herself anymore; she opened the box and instead of gifts, all the illnesses and hardships that gods had hidden in the box started coming out. Pandora was scared because she saw all the evil coming out and tried to close the box as fast as possible. The last thing to fly out was hope.

The purpose of the myth was to explain why there was suffering and misery in the world, and many contemporary religions brought this myth into their own teachings. In the Christian resurrection story, Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice on the cross so that we won't have to succumb to these evils ever again. He's the last thing out of the box, in the Christian story -- He is the hope of Christian people.

Hope exists on a huge continuum. We use the word "hope" so lightly sometimes. I just used it the other day when a friend told me about someone getting married for the third or fourth time, and I said, "Hope springs eternal!"

We hope the Yankees win. We hope the weather's nice this weekend. We hope that nice person asks us out on a date.

And on the spectrum of hope, we can use the word somewhere in the middle: We hope our friend gets that job. We hope we can quit smoking.

And we can call on hope with the full weight of the word: We hope cancer will go into remission. We hope the war overseas stops and our loved ones come home in one piece. We hope victims of natural disasters will benefit from our prayers for courage.

Hope allows us to carry on. Hope is more than just a stepping stone, it's like bannister we can hang on to as we navigate through life. Faith gives us the power to keep going, to take another step, and hope gives us something to hang on to while we're doing it.

Every single renewal or beginning has hope right alongside of it. Every morning we wake up with it. Every new relationship, new job, new start, new spring, new year. Today I ask you to use hope freely, for everything you do. It's out here in the world to counteract every bad mood or challenging event. It belongs to you! You can never have too much of it!

No one can take it away from you unless you allow them to. Think for a moment about anything you might have given up on. Did someone or something rob you of hope for carrying on?

In the myth of Pandora's box, the gods of the day released untold evil on the world, and all that was needed to counteract it was hope. With one hand they sent war, famine, disease, crime, hatred, poverty, pain and with the other hand, hope. Hope, only hope, to balance out all of that negativity. Doesn't that tell us something about the power of hope?

We know that even on the other side of the physical transition of death, life continues. WE know, as spiritualists, that life is eternal. Jesus died for us so we don't have to, so that we can hope for eternal life, that's the beauty of the resurrection story. Buddha continued to reincarnate long after he reached perfect compassion, as do the many bodhisattvas, so we too can hope for nirvana; that's the beauty of the reincarnation story.

Hope goes hand in hand with January 1st, springtime, the beginning of the school year, and every single second of every day. It is constantly renewing itself in us. Sometimes it's hope alone that gives us the power to start something new, or to try once again to conquer something we know we need to change.

Some wise person once suggested I make a list of the top three values of my life, and then to make every major decision based on whether the outcome would fit into the framework of that value system. It was hard to settle on just three, and I revised my list several times, but in the end hope was among them. And having the quality of being hopeful among my values, it actually led me to make some changes: to reshape a friendship that was structured mainly around complaining about the government, to stop watching terrible news stories, to include specific requests in my prayers, and as a result I enjoy so much more serenity and genuine optimism than I ever thought possible. The quality of being hopeful, begat more hope.

And when I get down to the nuts and bolts of what I do in my work, the thread that ties everything together is hope. When people come to me to hear from their loved ones in spirit, they're asking for hope. When they come for healing or hypnosis, they're coming for hope. YOU might say I'm in the business of hope.

I bet when you look at the basic building blocks of what you do, it's creating hope also. Whether you're a CEO or a babysitter, you're manufacturing or sustaining hope.

So what am I asking you to consider then, if we're all already in the business of hope -- if hope is our birthright and our constant companion? I like to call it "taking inspired action."

First we start with faith, that life means something; then we have hope to hang onto as time passes. Now we can stop here, and many people do; they may be prayerful and pleasant and good people, but I bet they feel a bit unfulfilled. This may be the kind of person who shrugs and says "it's God's will" when they lose a job or a home or a marriage; then they wait around, with faith and hope that all will work out in the end. Not a bad plan, but one that is missing an essential ingredient.

With faith that life has meaning, and hope that comes in with every new day, we can use our free will to take inspired action. I think that's what's meant by the old saying "God helps those who help themselves." I believe that -- having been a student of the gnostic tradition -- that God is available, personally, to all of us at all times, and is always trying to remind us that we can tap

into Him for direction. I believe God speaks to us through our own ideas, inspiration and experiences. So when we follow one of those ideas we're taking inspired action.

Now, there's a difference between reacting to something as we habitually do, and taking inspired action. Let me illustrate what I mean with this: I've recently -- and hopefully -- been inspired to begin a personal campaign to once and for all shut down those old tapes that are playing in my head, and to listen to God's direction and opinion of me only. No more old tape playing Mother's voice insinuating that I'll never amount to anything. In this personal campaign I've decided whenever I get defensive, I will honestly look at what old belief I am so fiercely defending.

Lately I've been talking about returning to school. An old friend suggested I might be taking on another project so I didn't really have to find out whether I would succeed or fail if I put 100% into being the best psychic medium I could be. Boy, was I furious! You would have thought the Huns were attacking, that's how defensive I got.

That's my flag now, that's that little Inspired Action guy waving a flag at me saying "X marks the spot! Dig right here!"

So I did, and I learned something about myself and I was able to turn down the volume a little bit on the old voice that said "your value is solely related to the degrees you acquire and the things you accomplish."

The old me -- the defensive me -- was reacting; the new me is taking inspired action. It doesn't work 100% of the time of course -- but I'm hopeful. And this Spring I hope to get closer to God, because I was inspired to take this kind of action. I hope to hear God's voice and direction more clearly than those other imbedded voices. And I'm the one who needs to stop reacting to them, and to take action to clear them out. Hope makes this whole process so much easier.

So I'd like to leave you with a couple thoughts: What can you resurrect or renew or begin now? Hope is just right here, waiting to step in and add some fuel to your dreams and goals. How can you take inspired action in that renewal?

Secondly, If you know someone who seems without hope, go visit them, send them a card or flowers. You don't need to solve their problems or fix their issues, just remind them about hope. Hope is self-perpetuating. Plant a little seed, step back and watch out. It's practically unstoppable.

Make it a point to leave everyone you encounter feeling more hopeful than before they ran into you; you know you'll be impacting the world in a way that truly balances all the negatives out there when you keep hope alive.

Amen.

