I don’t know about you, but having given it some serious thought, I’ve decided I’m not really all that interested in being resurrected.

When my days are done on this good green earth, I can’t quite imagine I’d truly care to come back for another tour of duty, or even that I could be swayed to stick out an eternal life in heavenly bliss.

Heaven, to me, has always seemed downright insufferable—what with all the clouds, and angels, and endless harp music.

It’s just always sounded a little too good to be true—packed with a bit more bliss than I suspect many of us could possibly bear for long—or, certainly, forever.

It’s not that I’m not keen on the idea of paradise, it’s just that I’ve learned that we have to find it in the here and now.

Often at memorial services, I share the words of Dorothy Munroe, who in her poem “The Cost” reminds us:

*Death is not too high a price to pay for having lived. Mountains never die, nor do the seas or rocks or endless sky.*

*Through countless centuries of time, they stay eternal, deathless. Yet they never live!*

*If choice there were, I would not hesitate to choose mortality. Whatever Fate demanded in return for life I’d give, for never to have seen the fertile plains nor heard the winds nor felt the warm sun on sands beside the salty sea, nor touched the hands of those I love—without these, all the gains of timelessness would not be worth one day of living and of loving; come what may.*
Dearly Beloved, come what may,  
I long for my life—and for yours—  
to be “all and enough”—that we might savour  
every day of living and loving that is ours.

I hope for us the capacity to recognise in our lives—  
imperfect and impossible as they may sometimes seem—  
the makings of whatever paradise is to be ours on this earth.

And, so, my prayer this Easter morning,  
 isn’t that we might in some distant future be resurrected from the dead,  
but that we might practise resurrection now,  
learning to revel in the newness of life  
well before our days are done.

But what a daunting proposition that can be!

How threatening we can find even the thought of resurrection.

How hard to roll away the stone  
and step out from the “tomb of the soul”  
into the fullness of our lives.

The poet W. H. Auden captured this struggle,  
with a deep insight into human nature, when he wrote:

  We would rather be ruined than changed,  
  We would rather die in our dread  
  Than climb the cross of the moment  
  And let our illusions die.

Science has recently confirmed the poet’s hunch.

Medical studies have shown that  
when told by a cardiologist they would, quite literally, die  
if they didn’t change their diet, exercise, and smoking habits  
only one in seven people were actually able to do so.¹

Maybe “we would [sometimes really]  
rather be ruined than changed. . .”

Obviously enough, change is hard.

Now, there is, of course, comfort to be found in the familiar. We do tend to stick with the devils we know, don’t we?

This is a point always present to me in the Passover seder.

As the Haggadah is read around the table at the seder dinner, and each of God’s acts of faithfulness recounted—of how God brought the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, parted the Red Sea to give them safe passage, and then sustained them in the desert for the next 40 years on manna—everyone at the seder responds to the recitation of each dramatic act by saying “Dayenu.”

In this single word is the notion that “it would have been enough.”

Chanting “Dayenu” is a way of honouring that even one of these acts would have been sufficient cause for giving thanks and praise.

With this one word, intoned over and over, the great story of the Exodus unfolds with one miracle after another as the Israelites first gain their freedom and then spend a few restive years in the desert.

Now, there is a peculiar Passover custom among Afghani Jews that I find particularly poignant for the way that it brings the whole story back down to earth.

When the Haggadah turns to remembering how God gave their ancestors enough manna from heaven to fill their stomachs, these Jews vigorously hit one another on the head with green onions.²

It’s a playful, physical reminder of how their forbears had become ungrateful when they had grown tired of eating manna in the desert.

In the Hebrew scriptures, there is an account of this story with the Israelites complaining bitterly:

We remember the fish that we used to eat in Egypt, [they said] the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic.

² https://www.haggadot.com/clip/afghani-onion-dayeinu-custom
Now our gullets are shriveled and our appetites gone. There is nothing at all. Nothing but this manna to look at.\(^3\)

Now, to be fair, forty years is probably a very long time to eat some strange bread that falls out of the sky day after day.

Maybe a little grumbling is warranted.

But God’s patience is exhausted when the people start wondering why they even left Egypt in the first place.

When they question why they ever followed God’s invitation to leave behind their cushy lives of slavery and forced labour.

Sometimes we would, indeed, rather be ruined than changed.

Sometimes, finding our way to freedom doesn’t entirely do the trick.

Sometimes, it’s not enough to roll away the stone and climb out of the tomb.

Sometimes, we need to be hit over the head with a green onion to help us recognise the freedom that is already ours, to see with gratitude that with every ending comes a beginning, to understand that with each dramatic change in our lives, the possibility of a new and different story starts to unfold—a story that even if outlined in terrible hurt and hardship can also be shot through with glory and with grace, with deeper meaning and a wider vision.

My colleague John Nichols writes that:

> The miracle of [the] Exodus is not whether or not the Red Sea parted. That is nothing more than a poetic conceit.

> The miracle of Exodus, he says, is that a group of people finally realised for themselves, for us, and for all time that you cannot stay in Egypt.\(^4\)

\(^3\) *The Book of Numbers* 11:5-6.

This, of course, is a lesson we all learn at different speeds.

And it’s a lesson we often have to learn over and over—that breaking through to whatever the future holds requires that we let go of what would keep us in captivity.

A few months ago, I shared with you Philip Simmons’ moving lessons on “learning to fall”—that there is freedom and even resurrection to be found in coming to terms with how very fragile our lives are.

Toward the end of his book, near the close of a life cut sadly short by ALS, he writes:

When we accept our impermanence, letting go of our attachment to things as they are, we open ourselves to grace.

When we stand calmly in the face of our passing away, when we have the courage to look even into the face of a child and say, “This flower, too, will fade and be no more.”

When we can sense the nearness of death and feel its rightness equally with birth, then we will have crossed over to that farther shore where death can hold no fear for us, where we will know the measure of the eternal that is ours in this life.5

That is the paradoxical lesson at the heart of this bright morning, here at the threshold of spring, at the high festivals of Passover and Easter—that we are far more resilient than we often know.

That we live under constant threat of resurrection.

That even when life comes unraveled, when we are forced beyond the brink of all that we know and trust, when we, at last, learn to fall with grace and into grace, we can begin to walk in the newness of life because we’ve learned we can no longer take any of it for granted.

5 Philip Simmons, Learning to Fall: The Blessings of an Imperfect Life, Bantam, 2003, p. 151.
We come to cherish each day for the gift that it is, knowing that it is a gift that will not and cannot last forever.

To live in this way is, quite simply, to practise resurrection.

The poet Antonio Machado reminds us that this way of life is at the heart of the Christian gospels.

I love Jesus, [he writes,] who said to us: heaven and earth will pass away. When heaven and earth have passed away, my word will still remain. What was your word, Jesus? Love? Forgiveness? Affection? All your words were one word: Wakeup.6

So, this Easter morning, let us wake up.

Let us look to the lily and the daffodil and the crocus, just beginning to emerge, seeing in their splendour something of our own; knowing that our glory, like theirs, will one day fade into the endless song of the universe.

Let us leave behind all that would enslave us, let us climb from our tombs and into the bright promise of Easter, that we might embrace with everything that is within us the miracle of life made new.

And let us not merely live under the threat of resurrection, but practise it this day and in all our days to come.

Will you pray with me?

Spirit of spring, Spirit of Passover, Spirit of Easter, Spirit of Life:

In the dawning of this new day, awaken us from our slumber,

6 Translated by Robert Bly, in The Soul Is Here For Its Own Joy.
and bring us to know again the glory of renewal unfolding all around us.

In bud and blossom, with bulbs rising from the soil,
awaken us this day to the in-breaking of hope,
even in hearts grown cold.

In the human spirit,
that somehow overcomes and perseveres,
yet lives with quiet dignity at the last,
awaken us to the healing strength to be found in our very own lives,
and in those with whom our life is bound up.

In the promise that arises from second chances,
awaken us to the transformation that comes through forgiveness
and by reaching beyond our fears.

In the resurrection of hopes denied and dreams deferred,
awaken us to the world’s deep suffering,
that we might become the bearers of hope
to those who suffer or despair.

In the dawning of this newest of days,
as we celebrate the resurgence of life,
may our hearts be glad and grateful
for the renewal of life all around us, and within us, too.

In the name of all that is sacred,
and the sacred that is in all, Amen.