

Inspirational meditations help both the religious and non-religious reader in transition reclaim the power of "spiritual" language in service to love and new life. Includes Facilitator's Guide. Foreword by singer and activist Kathy Mattea.

Accepting Your Resurrection

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# **Accepting Your Resurrection:**

**Reclaiming the Word that  
Restores Eternal Life**

**Christine McKaskle**

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ISBN 978-1-60145-412-6

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Printed in the United States of America.

Booklocker.com, Inc.  
2008

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*Jesus was about 30 years old when he began*

### *The Resurrection of Repentance*

*Luke 2:40-43, 45-51a, 3:23 - ...The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it...When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them...*

*Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work.*

I was in second grade at Annapolis Avenue School, when Tammy excitedly shared the news of her baptism with our class during Show and Tell. She said all her sins were washed away, because Jesus had died to pay for them.

Now this caught my attention, not to mention my morbid curiosity: What could a seven-year-old girl have done, I wondered, that anybody should die for? Tammy wasn't able to give me any specifics, but she had been trained that she was born in sin – that she

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was born bad and dirty - and the minister, who came to her house and poured water over her head as she hung it out the living room window, had made her good and clean.

We argued about this over lunch. She couldn't really believe she had been so bad. She just wanted to have a good Show and Tell, I was sure, and I was determined to make her admit it. In my frustration, I slapped the lunch table that folded out from the cafeteria wall. Sounding more like a pantheist than the Methodist she had just become, Tammy leaned across the table, to say to me through squinted eyes and jutted chin, "You just slapped God in the FACE!"

I felt a little thrill of alarm and sputtered, "I did not!"

"Yes, you did. Right in the face! God's in everything. He's in this table, and in this air, and in you and me and *everything!*"

Tammy had the last word. Of all she had said that day, that was something I could not argue with. I could feel the truth of it.

Over 30 years later, I wonder if Tammy has hung on to that knowledge, or if the indoctrination that began so early has completely buried the knowledge that God is in her. Was she able to keep that, or has she lost that, too, the way she lost the knowledge of her original goodness?

When I began to read the Bible for myself several years later, I saw that Jesus, too, believed in a child's original goodness and connection to God. He taught very clearly that we all - he, Tammy, me - were the offspring of God, and that every child born is to be treated with the welcome and honor that Jesus was accorded as rabbi. We are to continue to see ourselves as the children of God, subject to God's provision and instruction, all of our lives.

So I wondered about Jesus' baptism. I've wondered, ever since I was a little girl, just what Jesus was repenting of? But now I read again the story in the New Testament book of Luke, and I see it's all right there.

When Jesus was a boy, he instinctively knew his calling. He knew where he belonged. When he was 12 years old, Jesus made a trip to Jerusalem with his parents. His folks were an entire day into their journey home, before they realized Jesus wasn't with them. When they found him in the temple with the rabbis, where he felt at

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home, his parents rather hysterically asked him, “How could you do this to us?”

Innocently, Jesus had thought they’d recognize, as well as he did, that he belonged in the temple with the teachers. “Didn’t you know...?” he asked. We’re not told their answer to this question. What we’re told is that they didn’t understand, and that Jesus left with his parents. He went down from Jerusalem with them, the story says, and he was obedient to his parents. If he had hopes for the religious life, there is no record of it. Tradition says he took up carpentry, as his parents expected.

This story is usually told to small children in Sunday school to indoctrinate them into obedience; not only to their parents, but to the whole society around them through family, church, and school. There is usually no discussion about whether Jesus’ parents were wise to bring him home, or whether he was wise to submit.

Meanwhile, people have all kinds of fun researching what the historical Jesus might have done in the years between 12 and 30. While that may make for fascinating speculation, it’s not terribly relevant to this story as it is told in Luke. This story tells us very clearly what happened: Jesus went home and obeyed his parents. He conformed.

The next time we see Jesus, he encounters John the Baptist, a prophet preaching repentance. Repentance is simply a turning toward a different direction. In this encounter, it seems, Jesus remembers what he knew as a young boy, and he undergoes baptism. Clearly, from this point on, Jesus has no interest in doing something just because it’s traditional or expected of him. We cannot write off his baptism as a symbolic gesture of respect to John. Adult baptism is a voluntary experience of death and resurrection. What does Jesus need to resurrect?

Jesus resurrects his honest boyhood response to God’s dream for his life. Any time that a human being does that, s/he comes face to face with fear: “If I do what You ask, will I have enough to eat? Will I be included or ostracized? Will I be safe?” In the next chapter of Luke, the Spirit of God within takes Jesus directly into the wilderness of his own fear. In this encounter, Jesus is tempted by all the promises

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of conformity – money, power, and safety. He says, “No” to them all and affirms his single-minded commitment to God. He returns to the world and takes his place as rabbi and healer.

Jesus’ resurrection into eternal life began the moment he reclaimed his childhood knowledge of who he was, Whose he was, and what he was to do. The resurrection we always hear about, the one after Jesus’ crucifixion is actually a continuation of this first one. Through the empty tomb, the gospel writers illustrate that no one outside of ourselves can kill us. Even Jesus’ enemies couldn’t keep him from doing his work. Only Jesus was able to prevent himself from going about his work – until he was 30 years old.

As we accept our own resurrection into eternal life, our circumstances may change drastically. We may leave the family business – or even the family – as Jesus did. Or we may find that God has already placed us exactly where we need to be to do the work God gives us to do.

After his baptism, when Jesus taught that you have to love God more than your parents and more than your peers, he wasn’t saying we should harbor ill will against anyone. The rest of his teachings make that abundantly clear. He was saying that the opinion of others we’ve conformed to – parents, churches, employers, whomever – has to mean nothing to us relative to what God has called us to do.

Did Jesus mourn, during those 40 days in the wilderness, about the years he “wasted” between age 12 and 30? Maybe, at first. The concept of repentance carries with it the tinge of regret. But Jesus’ ministry was more effective as a result of his years among the people, not separated from them in the temple. Had he been raised in the temple, he might not have been able to free his listeners from slavish obedience to oppressive tradition. He might not have believed in the power to heal. When he resurrected his willingness to listen only to God, Jesus’ life was redeemed from any sense of waste. Ours is, too.

I’ve read that the name Jesus means, “God saves.” I think his story suggests two perspectives on saving. The kind of saving that we commonly associate with God is “to rescue.” From this viewpoint, Jesus is - or represents - that aspect of God that rescues us from harm, from despair, from our own worst impulses.



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Yet even people who pray to God – or to Jesus – get hurt, feel despair, and engage in destructive behavior. That’s where the other, more expansive meaning of “saves” comes in. God salvages, makes use of, so that nothing is wasted. Just as we save what might be trash to someone else, because it is a treasure to us.

God saves. God doesn’t consider anyone disposable. Not only that, but all the years spent running from God and your calling are redeemable, too, when viewed through God’s eyes. Whatever part of your life that you consider too cracked and broken to use is exactly the thing that God uses as the raw material for the work of art that is your resurrected life.

Even if you think you’re late in accepting your resurrection, be assured that all your experience up to now will not be wasted. Acknowledge that you have run on self-will, that you have walked away from your calling, and it’s time to change your direction. You wanted to please your family, a certain preacher, or people at church, work, or school. You wanted to protect yourself from their disapproval more than you wanted to love them. Offer that painful realization to God, and God will save that experience for you, until you can use it to help someone else.

You’ll not want to go back to the years of self-will, but you will no longer need your remorse. It will be gone as soon as you repent and hear Love say, “This is my Beloved, in whom I am well pleased.”

***I repent and surrender to Your resurrecting power in me.***



*Receive this day a resurrection of humility, that you may have a new enjoyment of life.*

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