

“Death Has Been Swallowed up”

Romans 6:1-14 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, {6 Or be rendered powerless} that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

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Over the years people have tried to come up with metaphors for Jesus' resurrection and for resurrection in general. The egg, for one, represents the grave or tomb and the hatching chick represents the bursting forth of new life from it. There's also the analogy of the caterpillar and butterfly. The caterpillar seemingly approaching the end of its life enshrouds itself in a cocoon and in time a butterfly which looks more glorious than the caterpillar emerges to fly away. And of course, who could forget spring in general. Winter comes the aged beauty of fall disappears. Everything is brown and grey. Up here the earth is enshrouded in snow. But the snow begins to disappear, the days get longer, the crocus and the iris begin to bloom and the next thing we know the grass is green again and a powerful array of daffodils and tulips give their praise. In the deserts of the Middle East there are these dry river beds called Wadis. The rivers themselves are formed only once a year when the rains come in spring. The ground is hard and rocky in the mountains so the water runs off forming little runs that gather together in valleys. Mysteriously, what weeks prior was a sandy, pinkish, beiges, and grey-yellow gravel pit becomes an awesome display of purple, pink, yellow, red, white, and green; the dead desert begins to bloom like new creation.

Well, one may ask why anyone would try to add resurrection metaphors to this already magnificent collection provided for us in the Creation, but that is what I will do. J.K. Rowling has provided us with a couple more from the world of Harry Potter that may endure the test of time. First, there are a group of very dark, ghostly characters known as the Dementors. They are what we'd call soul-sucking wraiths. They are blind and they fly and the way they find their way

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around is by sensing the positive emotions of people and when finding someone they latch onto them with the Dementor's Kiss and start sucking the soul out of the person and while doing so they force the person to relive their worst memories. When finished, all they leave behind is an empty shell of a person who is not yet dead. The visual graphics of this soul-sucking in the Harry Potter movies is quite an image. They suck the soul out the person and the person gets all distorted like his face is being sucked up into a huge vacuum cleaner.

The next characters are the Death Eaters. The Death Eaters are the minions of the main villain of the Potter series whose name is Lord Voldemort, or him whose name shall not be spoken. He surrounded himself with twenty-nine or so of these despicable Death Eaters who carried out his will. Voldemort's main desire was the elimination of all Muggle-born witches or Mudbloods so that pure bloods could have complete control of the world of witches. A Muggle was someone who was half witch and half human. I don't know why Rowling called them Death Eaters. None of them actually ate death. All they did was run around causing a lot of death, indiscriminate death at that. They'd be better called Life Eaters.

By now you are probably wondering what exactly this rather satanic sounding stuff has to do with Jesus and resurrection. First, let me say to my own defence that no metaphor captures the meaning of what resurrection is for we cannot imagine what death is like and resurrection, having gone through death and come out the other side, is equally unimaginable. This is what Jesus has done. Jesus resurrected is the first born of the New Creation which is the recreation of this Creation in which we know God unhindered by sin, where Heaven and Earth are one, and there will be no more death. As Isaiah foresees, “On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken” (Is. 25:7-8). The Lord will swallow up death forever. What has happened with Jesus' death and resurrection is that the Holy Trinity has begun to swallow up death in his very self forever. When God the Son become human as Jesus of Nazareth and died, God in his very self experienced death and the wake of that event is the beginning of the destruction of sin and death throughout God's Creation. When death and that which causes death are dead, that which was alive will live again.

Now to jump back into Harry Potter, like Lord Voldemort's desire to eliminate impure blood from the witch population, our God, the LORD Almighty wants to remove the sin and death that has infected humanity and all of his creation. So, God's way of removing this infection is to become a Death Eater. God the Son becomes human as Jesus who lives a righteous life but suffers the death of the unrighteous. By means of the death of God the Son as the righteous man Jesus of Nazareth God swallows death and it is destroyed. Then God let's loose the Life Giving Spirit, the Holy Spirit who resurrects Jesus bringing God the Son back to life and sets in motion the New Creation. By Baptism we share in Jesus death and resurrection. Until Lord Jesus returns, the Holy Spirit, like a Dementor in reverse, is sucking sin and death out of human

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souls and creating human communities of people who have had their death eaten and are striving to live anew filled with the life of God.

Paul said in our passage from Romans, “The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Friends, we have died with Christ Jesus in Baptism. When we die, we, like him, will live again. So also, as he now lives anew, we by the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us share in his new life now. We are free from sin to live to God. He has made it possible for us to live Holy Spirit-led lives rather than driven by sinful passions. This is life lived devotedly, life lived aware of God presence with us, life lived prayerfully, life lived in Christian where self-giving love rules the way, life lived Scripturally, life led driven by God’s will rather than our own. Friends, live life alive to God, live righteously. Amen.