

John 20.1-18; Acts 10:34-43.

Easter Sunday 5th April 2015

8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's, Totteridge

'The Resurrection of the Dead'

Grant, O God, that in the written word, and thru' the spoken word, we may behold the Living Word, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In a little while, and as we are required to do each Easter, we shall make a solemn renewal of our baptismal vows. In the liturgy immediately preceding this, on p.5, I will mention the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. There's a representation of the cross on which he died, just there, but there's no easy way to represent his resurrection, other than perhaps an empty cross, with no figure attached.

I suspect that each of us will have our own particular understanding of what 'resurrection from the dead' means. Some may feel that the word 'resurrection' is just an elaborate metaphor for coming thru' a difficult time, but the Christian perspective, as for those whose lives have been truly shattered in some way or another, means that this becomes much more than that.

The NT speaks of a process of deepening participation in the life of God in metaphors such as 'losing one's life' or 'dying to God', but Sarah Bachelard has pointed out how much more messy and painful this feels when we actually live thru' it. Trying to get over our egos, to dispense with our self-protective armour, is central to a healthy, growing, Christian faith. Faith is not a static thing that requires bland resignation – to help something change and grow requires effort, and this effort, as with so many things to do with love, often involves anguish, making ourselves vulnerable; acceptance that, thru' the pain, there are good lessons to be learnt.

It was only by his acceptance of *alienation* and *death* that Jesus breaks their power over human life. I say 'breaks' – the present tense – because he can only do this *for you* in the present age if you truly believe in the power he unleashed to bring about change

It's often the case that we're only brought to faith by undergoing a traumatic episode of our own, albeit one with either a sad or joyous outcome. It's through knowing in our own experience of the promise and possibility of life after death that the story of Christ can work its power to transform.

It's not just about suppressing all the darkness within us; this only creates tension and makes us judgmental. There's a world of difference between conformed lives of moral effort and those transformed by a journey of death and resurrection. Transformed life has learned that the whole of us, including all those things we don't want to acknowledge, need to be yielded up and handed over to God.

As we begin to approach this way of being, then something amazing happens! Life and all the goodness we participate in, becomes not ours, but God's. We find ourselves becoming more joyful, more thankful, more gracious, as we're slowly filled with the grace of God. We begin to see that all the badness is *our stuff*, all the hate and hurt and envy is *our stuff* – and all the goodness we have in our hearts is of God, it reflects God, it magnifies God.

Some folk think that the point of being a Christian is to believe certain things and to make ourselves good over the top of whatever else is there. This is Elastoplast theology – first time it rains, the plaster comes off! When the risen Jesus encounters Peter in Galilee he asks him three times 'do you love me'? It's as

though Jesus is checking his credentials after that three-fold denial before the cock crowed, as though he wants him to recognise his betrayal before he can be forgiven, but that's not the way Jesus works.

Rowan Williams says that it's rather that unless Peter can face up to the full truth of what he did, he can't be given back to himself and be re-called into the new life and renewed relationship. There'd always be a part of himself to be avoided, plastered-over, thru' denial, fear or self-loathing. Forgiveness is offered for free, but it has to cost something to be able to receive the gift.

It's always the same for each of us, individually and corporately; as people and as a church. We have to learn to see ourselves more clearly, in all the ambiguity of our goodness or virtue, especially the ways we refuse to allow ourselves to be forgiven, because we can't face our wounded selves. If the church is to be the body of the crucified and risen Christ, truly capable of witnessing to resurrection, then we must be willing ourselves to undergo resurrection, moving away from all that brings numbness and death, moving towards the God who makes all things new.

Bachelard says 'Transformation leads to a kind of softening, and the possibility of solidarity... we are less afraid of the untidiness and unresolvedness of life and more able to trust the promise of healing and new life thru' death. It is a way of integration and hope.' How can we give ourselves over to that journey? Trust in God – and allow it to happen. One day, we'll find ourselves with a choice between despair and hope. As Mary Magdalen at the tomb, we may not even know what to hope for, but faith hopes anyway.

What we do here today strengthens that hope. Worship helps to form us in hope; it's not about building ourselves a religious ego. Baptism was the first step in placing our faith in God thru' Christ. Holy Communion helps us to know ourselves as betrayers, where any illusions of goodness and self-sufficiency are stripped away, in the knowledge that Jesus calls us into relationship with the divine.

I know that much of what I've said today is not something that can really be told, or taught, or preached. The essence of what I've tried to say must largely be learned by each of us as we journey along. But what I hope you'll remember is this, that whilst it will always cost you something, Christ our Lord offers you and all humanity a pathway to heaven. Because of what he did for us in his time on earth, whatever you've experienced in life, whatever you have yet to experience, you are continually and freely invited to experience his resurrection life, an invitation that will never be withdrawn.

The increasingly frightened, grasping and alienating world desperately needs to know about the love of God. We can only proclaim this if we walk with Christ in the way of the cross, continually giving ourselves to him and the new life he brings.

Spoken in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

John 20.1-18 The Resurrection of Jesus

20

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she

said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'

¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Acts 10:34-43 Gentiles Hear the Good News

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

The New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition), copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the [National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America](#). Used by permission. All rights reserved.