

Surrounded by Resurrection

St George's Anglican Church
Epsom , Auckland.

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Readings

OT Job 19:23-27
Epistle 1 Peter 1:3-9
Gospel Matthew 28:1-10

Peter ran to the tomb when the women who had gone there first at dawn, came back to tell the men that the tomb was empty. The other men did not believe the women, but Peter needed to see for himself. When he got there, he bent over to look inside and saw the strips of linen lying by themselves and he went away wondering to himself what had happened (Luke 24:12).

Of the 12 disciples Peter is the one who will push the boundaries. Here he is now – needing to know – wanting to find out. He is driven by curiosity, perhaps a hunger for truth, or just plain impulsivity. Peter is the one who can't sit still. He is the one who steps aside from the disbelief of his friends and runs to see. His impulsivity has landed him in trouble before, but that is probably the way he has learned. It was only a few hours ago that he was cut to the core of his soul with the guilt of disowning Jesus; but don't forget that on that occasion too, he was the only disciple who had run to see what was going to happen to Jesus. Where were the others then ? And when Peter disowned Jesus, Luke tells us that Jesus turned and looked straight at him and Peter went away and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62). I suspect it would have been a look full of love and forgiveness; one of those looks that says more than a 1000 words. And so still smarting with the horrible guilt of his disloyalty and pierced by that look burnt into his memory – he runs to the tomb. When he saw for himself that Jesus was not there, he left wondering what had happened.

There are 10 separate occasions reported in the New Testament of Jesus' appearances to people in a risen form that had materiality. He could be touched and recognised visually; when he spoke his voice was recognised; he listened, ate and socialized, and remember, it is reported that in all more than 500 people saw him. We don't accept that these people were a bunch of hallucinating traumatically grief stricken neurotics having psychotic episodes as some have suggested. His materiality was of a form not known to human understanding then of even today, because being able to appear and disappear without being constricted by travel and physical barriers is a form of existence that is beyond us to understand. It is a new creation.

Therefore 40 days later, Peter's wonderings at the tomb are replaced by utter certainty of belief. He is firmly convinced that Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead and fearlessly proclaims this to the thousands who heard the first sermon – "God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him....God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact." (Acts 2:24 &32). The resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental and central point that the very first Gospel sermon was built around and today ought also to be the core and central feature of our preaching. Jesus is alive. Our faith is not founded on myth or psychobabble or legend but on a fact that is too difficult for us to believe without God's help, too amazing to accept without faith and too radical to live by without surrender. In spite of that God has shown us that it is OK to believe, by placing before us and before all history a factual event that blasts away regular views of reality and transports us into a completely new reality.

The new reality is that death is not the end of our experience, and re-creation of us is possible because God has shown that that is so in the resurrection of Christ. Resurrection invades every minute of our life by providing a foundation upon which our entire existence rests, or an overarching canopy under which every moment is lived.

Although resurrection is a reality of history it is as someone has said.....the manifestation of something entirely new. Eternal life has appeared in the midst of mortality¹. Resurrection is a reality of hope in our midst that enables us to live with all the comings and goings of life, the highs and lows, the joys and sorrows, the foreseen and the unforeseen with deep abiding peace and confidence that there is a purpose for all things that is connected with the hope of our own resurrection to come. It is resurrection that would have enabled St Paul to write "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him....." (Rom 8:28)

Without resurrection Paul could not say that. Without resurrection, life surely can be nothing but a mystery of meaninglessness around which sceptics build imaginative theories.

Resurrection had previously been a hope without evidence – an inspired hope of course as is seen in Job's magnificent outburst

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;

I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!
Job 19:25-27

.....and also in many of David's Psalms eg:

But God will redeem my life from the grave;
he will surely take me to himself. Psalm 49:15

¹ G.E.Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*: Lutterworth 1974 p 323

For Peter, Jesus' resurrection was a reality – more than an inspired hope, and for Paul whose writings were to follow, your resurrection and mine similarly is not just an inspired hope, but a certainty.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
Philippians 3:20-21

This certainty is God's gift to us in raising Jesus. How fortunate were we when compared to Job and David. We know Christ is risen !!

Jesus resurrection was not resuscitation. It was a new creation. God creates anew out of nothing – out of ashes. Creation is what God does, and what God creates is beautiful, is good. God is constantly at work in our lives in the risen Christ, re-creating us, giving us new birth, renewing our spirits, re-forming us, refining us, taking old things away for us and making every thing new, forgiving us and setting our feet on new paths, transforming negative circumstances into blessings. God is creating afresh in our lives every day. Embracing the Risen Christ, puts new lenses over our eyes so that we can see things that otherwise we couldn't – the beauty, the blessing, the renewal, the forgiveness, the grace and the love that is always there when God creates. Jesus' resurrection brought life out of death² and when the risen Christ comes into our life that's what he does for us. We are surrounded by resurrection.

Someone came to see me a couple of weeks ago and told me that she had been able to believe that Jesus was risen, but she didn't know where to look for him. There's a challenge for us, because the risen life of Christ should be seen in us as we live from day to day.

The resurrection does not mean that the earthly Jesus is relegated to past history.....Faith seeks the earthly Jesus not as a dead teacher , but as the living Lord whose word and work were not merely accomplished once upon a time, but are now and ever present in the community
R.H.Fuller³

Listen – to Jesus Himself:

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. John 5:24

This is not about when we die – it is about when we live !! So if we have Christ's risen life in us, if we truly believe in the risen Jesus, then we have to be

² From R. Nikkel (President of Prison Fellowship International) in *Conservato Morum: Jesus and Politics* 29 March 2010 see www.pfi.org

³ Cited from *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* vol 3, Resurrection p289

committed to living his risen life. If we say we believe Jesus is alive and our lives don't show forth his life then we are not genuine.

Here are some pieces from St Paul, and look how he describes the transformation that should be going on inside us –

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
2 Corinthians 3:18

Are we living in surrender to the presence of the risen Christ so that it could be said that we are being transformed into His likeness ? Look again at St Paul:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death
3:10
Philippians

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit who lives in you.
Romans 8:11

These are St Paul's expressions of how resurrection should impact on us today. We are risen with Christ now and St Paul has no doubt that that should bring life giving activity of God into every stage of our mortal life up until our own transformation.⁴

But there's a dimension to resurrection that we must mention because writings are emerging that place the restoration and redemption of creation as part of the power and purpose of Christ's resurrection.

We need to acknowledge that the fall of humanity took God's beautiful creation down with it. Humankind was to be God's...shepherd King, the benevolent ruler over nature who had its best interests at heart⁵ and it was to tenderly and properly care for .We know how we have failed in that and the resurrection of Christ is joyful news to the burdened abused systems of nature.

Roy McCloughry says that resurrection is God's affirmation of creation⁶ because Christ's resurrection was a new act of creation and the first that signalled God's plan to restore everything in due course to the beauty and perfection God originally intended for humanity and creation. Marshall says that the entry of sin in the Genesis narrative affects the ground and distorts humanity's relationship with the land, so the final banishment of sin will see the wider created order restored to wholeness. All creation will share in the glorious destiny of redemption.⁷

So as people of the risen Christ we should see the world around us through the lens of resurrection and be counted with those who are working to conserve,

⁴ See C.K Barrett *Epistle to the Romans* Black (1975) p 160 re Rom 8:11

⁵ Roy McCloughry *Living in the presence of the Future* IVP 2000 p27

⁶ Supra p 30

⁷ Christopher D. Marshall *Crowned with Glory & Honour* Pandora 2001 p110

preserve and decontaminate our environment. It is God's environment and the resurrection of Christ is also engaged in its re-creation and restoration to its pristine purpose. Therefore as St Paul says on this point - the whole creation awaits in eager expectation...groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Rom 8:18-25).

We are surrounded by resurrection.

Jesus is risen though not just to comfort us and be our companion, but to take his rightful place as Lord of all, sustainer of the universe and king of creation.

He is the one in control of the atoms, the particles and quarks upon which the physical universe depends⁸. He is the one through whom John says the world was made...without him nothing was made that was made (John 1:3-10) and of whom St Paul says is before all and in him all things hold together.... And through him God reconciled all things to himself whether on earth or in heaven by making peace through his blood shed on the cross (Col 1:15-21)⁹

He is the Lord of all, the sustainer of life and everything in the universe - great and small, the King of creation of all we see and touch and feel and enjoy, the artist who invented beauty, the source of all love, our redeemer, refresher, renewer, restorer and the lover of our souls. We are surrounded by His resurrection.

Peer into that tomb for yourself this morning - like Peter. See that there is no-one there, but don't turn away wondering what has happened. Christ has risen from the dead. He is risen indeed!!

⁸ D. Willard *Divine Conspiracy* Fount 1998 p368