

## Resurrection – Empty tomb

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Readings: OT : Psalm 16 vss 5-11  
 Epistle: Philipians 3 vss 10-14  
 Gospel: John 20 vss 1-16  
 Verse for the day: Hebrews 11 vs 6

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a core tenet of our faith. The power of the Gospel to save us from the hopelessness of the human condition is in the fact that Jesus was not terminated by human death. His human death and then His resurrection was the event by which His true identity was revealed and God's power was demonstrated. Richard Rohr humorously chides that we tend to rather glibly refer to Jesus Christ as if *Christ* was the surname of Jesus. But the description of Jesus as Christ tells us something of who he really was and why death could not hold him. The Jesus of history who walked the streets was always the Creator God of the Divine Trinity, the Logos or eternal Word, the eternal presence amongst us of Divine love revealed at all times, in all things and in all places. The Resurrection of the Jesus of Nazareth revealed a new and transcendent form of reality that death has no power over. In the Jesus of Nazareth the Word became flesh and existed in time. In Resurrection the Word becomes cosmic and exists outside of time.

The Gospel has many layers of good news for us, and one piece is in the promise that as Jesus was raised so too will we be.

*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

1 John 3:2

Let's look at the event of the empty tomb from the standpoint of 4 followers, as recorded in John chapter 20.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb before sunrise. She clearly knew where it was<sup>1</sup>. The day before, she with crowds of others, had witnessed the brutal cruelty of Jesus' crucifixion – had heard the mocking and bullying insults and watched the physical abuse and torture. She'd have heard the cries of Jesus and watched his wounds open. She'd have stood helplessly by as he was nailed to the cross and watched as it was dropped into the hole made for it with a thud. She'd have heard his prayers – his brief exchange with the thief and his cries to forgive his attackers. I expect that she wouldn't have slept a wink that night, the vivid horror of all she'd seen being replayed in her mind over and over. The raised emotion in her heart was more powerful than anything else for her at this time and she needed to bring something into the circumstances from her deep appreciation of all Jesus had done for her. He had done so much that she couldn't just let his death go without a response. There have been many suggestions about the sort of woman Mary was but it matters not because in her circumstances whatever they were, Jesus had treated her in an unforgettable way – dignifying her with grace

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 15:47

and forgiveness and filling her with self respect so that she would no longer be held back in life. He had healed her. She loved him greatly.

She sees that the stone had been rolled away and that the tomb was empty and ran to find Peter and John. They sprinted to see for themselves, John outsprinting Peter, but then he stopped short of going into the tomb. He peered in to see burial cloths but no body. A puffing ( I presume!) Peter arrived and with impetuosity that was characteristic of him he went past John right into the tomb and was able to observe more detail. Indeed he could see that there was no body but he noted that the cloth that had been around Jesus head was separate from the other cloths and neatly folded. Luke says however, that Peter left the scene wondering what had happened.<sup>2</sup> Not so John. He now entered the tomb - saw and believed. The implication is that for John who paused to take things in a little more slowly than Peter, belief came to him then and there. He knew from what he saw that Jesus had risen.

The 2 men left, but Mary had unfinished business and stayed. Her emotions were engaged and she needed to bring a woman's tenderness to the closure of this relationship which had nurtured her to wholeness. By herself again, weeping, she bent over to peer into the tomb. There she saw 2 angels where Jesus' body ought to have been and a man behind her asking her why she was crying. At this point we know that Mary had no belief that Jesus was risen because she asks the man to tell her where the body is so that she could go

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 24:12

and get it. Then Mary receives her glorious revelation that Jesus is alive when she hears Him call her name – *Mary*. She believed.

Belief that Christ is risen may come in all manner of awakenings and paths of realisation, but it matters not when the end result is that one is able say Christ is risen

These followers believed Jesus had risen by their own processes of human experience. John who would have seen the folded cloth put together the inference from what he saw using deduction, reasoning and logic. Mary's experience was in the blessing of elation in the actual presence of Jesus and the wave of emotion when she heard him call her name. Peter's experience was when in the company of the rest of the group that night, Jesus appeared to them all. He seems to have waited for the assurance that others would know what he was talking about and that he wasn't the only one making an outrageous assertion. That's probably when he believed.

Finally there's the 4<sup>th</sup> follower to mention – Thomas. His friends had told him that Jesus had visited them. He wasn't there at the time, and he said he would not believe unless he could touch the wounds of Jesus. That was the experience he needed and God gave that to him when Christ came to them again a week later. Thomas believed. *My Lord and my God!*

All of Jesus' followers had an experience that had met their human need for proof. Human intuition when seeking to understand a situation is to apply rationality and follow the formula that seeing is

believing. The risen Christ gave them that. They had all seen Him now.

But then Jesus says a quite startling thing to the group when speaking to Thomas:

*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*<sup>3</sup>

In this Jesus is completely reversing the human intuition to apply a rational process to a situation. Having seen to believe and being overjoyed at that, they are now being told by Jesus that there is even greater blessing in believing without seeing.

Jesus is preparing the disciples for life under the new covenant. He had spoken to them about this. Remember in the last supper 4 nights before he shared wine with them telling them it was the blood of the new covenant<sup>4</sup>. There was going to be a new relationship of faith.

No longer would they be bound by their own actions, behaviours and rituals so as to be acceptable to God. They would be released from this burden. Resurrection smashed that out of the park ! The release of God's power to love and forgive would no longer dependent on them and what they did. God's power to love, forgive and redeem is in the gift of the risen Christ who brings a relationship of new beginnings new birth and new hope to humanity The new covenant is one of grace that flows totally from the Divine Trinity of the

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<sup>3</sup> John 20:29

<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:20

Godhead and is proven to the believer by the presence of the risen Christ as a gift to the heart. The awareness and knowledge that Jesus is risen is planted in us. In the new covenant the way of faith - is believing without seeing.

The prophet Jeremiah (and others<sup>5</sup>) foretold the new covenant:

*This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time, ' declares the LORD.*

*'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God. and they will be my people.*

Jeremiah 31:33

The writer to the Hebrews very clearly explains the path of faith under the new covenant:

*....without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

Hebr 11:6

Seeing becomes the reward of believing first.

Christ's resurrection points to a new reality. God is constantly at work in our lives in the risen Christ giving us new birth, renewing our spirits, re- forming us, refining us, re-creating us; taking old things away and making things new; forgiving us and setting our feet

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<sup>5</sup> eg Ezek36:26

on new paths; transforming negative circumstances into blessings. Embracing the Risen Christ, puts new lenses over our eyes with the reward that we see things that otherwise we couldn't – the beauty, the blessing, the renewal, the forgiveness, the grace and the love that is always there .

A good friend of mine when describing his own inward assurance that he was a new creation and that Christ was risen in his life puts it this way:

*It felt like a healing: it felt like a gift from God: it felt like power that is still in motion* Josh Jones Sermon 7<sup>th</sup> April

Living in the knowledge that resurrection also awaits us gives a meaning and purpose to our life because this knowledge should encourage us to live our here and now life as preparation for our hereafter life. We now have the greatest purpose ever for our lives today.

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

We try to make sense of our human journey and we seek to feel the power of the risen Christ in the midst of our perpetual stumblings

but we can be comforted in this because St Paul is on the same page. He too yearned to ... *know Christ and the power of His resurrection*<sup>6</sup> in his life.

*I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead* Philippians 3:10-11

But you will see that St Paul connects knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection, with the sufferings of Christ. Remember, Jesus Himself clearly taught that if one was to follow Him one must deny oneself and take up the cross.<sup>7</sup> The path to knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection is unlikely be through comfort, indulgence, opulence, the warm glow of a satisfying public image, often things that we call blessings. For most of us in our comfortable material circumstances, the path to knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection will begin when we are prepared to undergo painful exercises of confronting our demons, our perversions, unloading our baggage, dealing with our foibles and neuroses, exposing our secret malices and envies, yielding up our ambitions, confessing our addictions. It begins with the pain of self denial, and then it will be found in service and sacrifice, in setting other's interests before ours, in being content to be last and not first, and in humble living. And I suggest further that the power of the Risen Christ is more

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<sup>6</sup> See Phil 3:10

<sup>7</sup> Matt 16:24-26

likely to be proven in our lives not in short albeit thrilling experiences, but in the strength given to us to be faithful to the end, to last the distance, to run the race, to do the work and to fight the battle, all of which are vivid metaphors St Paul uses to describe the Christian walk, and none of which are easy. And we can prove His risen presence by growing more like Him on that journey. Resurrection life flows in you like those rivers of living water that Jesus spoke about <sup>8</sup>every time you lovingly act, spread joy around you, bring peace to a situation, show patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control (the “fruit of the Spirit”<sup>9</sup>); and every time you forgive and quell anger (particularly your own). It is the Risen life of Christ given freely to you that keeps you faithful and enables you to continue the walk toward God. Christ will be known to us as we access His power implanted in us to behave as He would. Why would we not seek to live more like this and lift our game? After all, to use modern management speak, we have the resources!

It was Thomas who first proclaimed Jesus as his Lord and Master when he saw and touched the wounds of crucifixion that remained on Jesus resurrected body.<sup>10</sup> The Risen Christ will always bear the scars of his crucifixion even in the new world. It is those scars that will forever reminded us that we live because He died.

It is in His risen presence in our lives that he walks with us in our stumblings, not abandoning us to our foolishness but holding our

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<sup>8</sup> John 4:14

<sup>9</sup> Gal:5:22

<sup>10</sup> John 20:28

shaking hands with his wounded hands. By His wounds we are healed.

Jesus comes to us today in the bread and the wine – and in these elements we are reminded of His body broken and His blood shed. We cannot see His wounds or touch them – but we will one day. Whilst in the bread and the wine there is the solemnity of remembering His suffering, there is also the gift of joy and revelation in knowing that we are alive in Him even now and forever because He is risen.

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11 April 2021