

Good morning. A few weeks ago, a very deep 6-year-old asked me a question in church. She asked: Why do we say that Jesus died instead of us if we still die? So I promised this 6 year old that I would try to address her question when I was speaking on the resurrection. Well, I tell you, this was one of the hardest sermons I've ever prepared for, and I was happy to get the email on Friday to say that there was kids church, because as this sermon shaped up in this those fleeting moments on holiday, I realised this all got pretty abstract, and not at all accessible for a 6 year old! Which you may, or may not be pleased about.

In our gospel reading, we see the risen Jesus encounter the disciples, who are gathered and hiding behind locked doors in Jerusalem. In this passage, I see three things that Jesus does. He declares peace to them, invites them to really see his body, and gives them a job to do. As I reflected on these, I saw they connect to three of the main images the church has used to understand what Jesus has done for us. The early church, when reflecting on what it means for Jesus to be the Christ, the anointed one, thought of the three anointed roles in the Hebrew Scriptures, the priest, the king and the prophet. I see these metaphors at play in this passage. That Jesus as our great high Priest offered a perfect sacrifice instead of us, bring us peace, that Jesus as our true and victorious King died for us to give us hope beyond death, and that Jesus as a righteous Prophet lived and died with us, that we might live with him.

Jesus our Priest

Looking at our text we see firstly, as Josh reflected on beautifully last week, that Jesus appears in the midst of his disciples, and declares, "peace be with you." Now, we Anglicans can get a little over-used to this phrase, repeating it every week. The gospels, however, keep this particular phrase "peace be with you" for this resurrection moment, in Luke and John. Yes, Jesus has spoken peace to storms and waves. He has said to those that he healed, go in peace. But this is the first moment that this particular phrase is used to the disciples. What is this peace? The phrase invokes the Hebrew shalom and indicates every kind of peace, yet with a predominance of the notion of peace with God.

Jesus declares a state of peace with God to the disciples. Yet the text doesn't say, "Peace be with you." And they were at peace. No. Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you." And they were startled and terrified, frightened, and doubting, joyful yet disbelieving and wondering. Jesus declares a state of peace

with God, yet despite this, life still finds them in all their emotions and fears, their questions, and their doubts.

Marva Dawn writes in *The Unnecessary Pastor*, “Is peace a feeling or a fact? When we are concerned with the peace of God, it is a fact, of course. Shalom begins in reconciliation with God, and only because of that can we come into shalom with ourselves and others.” Sometimes we may feel a supernatural peace in the midst of the life’s turmoil. Other times we do not. We remain afraid, anxious and doubting. Yet Jesus comes to us and declares a state of peace with God.

And Jesus says to the disciples, “Why are you afraid and doubting? Look at my hands and feet.” That is, look at the signs of the cross. Why does Jesus carry the marks of the crucifixion in his resurrection? Preaching on the cross? Because the resurrection only makes sense in light of the cross, and vice versa. The two cannot be separated. Why can Jesus proclaim God’s peace to a bunch of frightened and anxious disciples? Because of what he did on the cross.

Because of certain presentations of the Gospel, many want to remove from the Easter story any sense of Jesus dying in our place. What is often called substitutionary atonement. Part of the problem has been a particular emphasis on punishment within the Protestant tradition. Also, by individualising this idea, we think about it in terms of me and my sin, as opposed to all of humanity. So I understand the need to correct this emphasis.

However, Fleming Rutledge, in her magnificent book *The Crucifixion*, which lays out all the various motifs the NT uses for the crucifixion writes: “Opposition to the motif of substitution derives at least in part from the contemporary wish to avoid the themes of sin and judgement. Sin forms no part of many contemporary accounts of the crucifixion. Instead, we hear something like:

Q: Why did Jesus die?

A: To show us how much God loves us.

Although this answer about God’s love is indeed true, it does not serve as an adequate account of what happened.” It does not account for the NT’s repeated declaration that Christ died for sin. To paraphrase Paul’s inconceivable proclamation: the sinless one became Sin-itself, that we might become the righteousness of God. Jesus represents us without any co-operation on our part, as a sheer act of grace.

Jesus makes the perfect sacrifice on our behalf as our great high priest. However, we need to remember that the point of the sacrificial system for the Israelites was not a transactional “payment” for sin, but an act of restoring relationship that’s been broken by sin, which Jesus’ sacrifice does perfectly.

Now, the metaphor of substitution is just one of the many metaphors to describe our reconciliation with God, and has perhaps been overemphasised, but it is an important one, and one we throw away at pastoral loss. I am reminded of Chris Clarke’s fantastic Palm Sunday sermon. About how there are many gates into Jerusalem. If we wall up this metaphor, this entrance into the gospel, we lose the consolation of peace, that can be given to those who, like the disciples, are frightened and doubting. This metaphor of Jesus as Priest who dies instead of us is good news, especially for those who feel the weight of guilt and shame.

Jesus our King

So Jesus has declared a state of peace to the disciples, by the reconciling sacrifice of his body. The second thing we see in this reading, is Jesus emphasising his resurrected body. “See, touch” he says to the disciples, “I am not a spirit or a ghost, I have flesh and bones, and while you’re getting your heads around that, I’m hungry, you got anything to eat?” For the first 1000 years of the church, theologians saw our biggest problem being our captivity to Death, and therefore our alienation from God who is Life. This remains the prevailing view in Eastern churches. A view which sees our primary problem as death. Why do we say Jesus died for us, if we still die? Hence, the metaphor of Jesus as the Victorious King defeating Sin and Death in his resurrection.

Appearing to the disciples in the flesh is an assurance for them of the hope of the resurrection. Our hope is not that some part of our being is immortal and will go to heaven when we die. No, our hope is in the death-conquering love of God in Christ, which gives us the assurance of our resurrection. Jesus defeated Sin and Death, therefore, whatever may come, we can declare with Paul:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

By entering the grave as an innocent man, Jesus exposed the power of death, for it had no claim over him. As the author of Hebrews writes, “through death, he destroyed the one who has the power of death” and delivered us all from slavery to it. Jesus’ resurrection gives his disciples an assurance of the hope of their resurrection.

Interestingly however, despite the importance of this resurrection hope for Paul and the other NT writers, they don’t spend too much time speculating as to the nature of this resurrection. For Paul, this hope we have is of central importance. He says “if there is no resurrection from the dead, then followers of Jesus of all people are most to be pitied.” Yet he doesn’t spend too much time giving us a picture of what it will be like. He critiques the elite of the Corinthian Church who want to ask silly questions about the nature of the resurrection. He is content, as usual, with metaphor. In this case, a metaphor of our bodies being like a seed. He contents himself with the hope itself, that comes from Jesus as the victorious King, who has conquered death. Which leads us to our final observation from the text.

Jesus the Prophet

Jesus has declared peace as Priest, has shown his body as a symbol of his victory over death as King, lastly, Jesus invites the disciples into participation with the way of the cross and resurrection. He commissions them to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all nations in his name. He tells them that they have been witnesses, and that when the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they shall be witnesses again – to the ends of the earth. A witness, which as you may know comes from the word where we get martyr, is one who participates in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The NT writers don’t spend much time speculating about the nature of the resurrection because Jesus gives us a job to do. Marva Dawn again, “Since we Christians know that God has perfected his shalom at the cross, we can claim it as a fact and let that empower us to work for its manifestation in human affairs.”

Paul’s chief metaphor for what is going on the cross, is that of participation. That Christ shared all our experience, including death, so that we, by virtue of our solidarity with him, might share his life.

This is precisely what we proclaim in our baptism, that as we go down into the water, we enter into the grave with Jesus, and we are raised out of the water into his new life. In our Corinthians reading, Paul sees this as liberating good news, we are all dead in Christ, therefore all alive in and to him. We are free to

no longer live for ourselves but for him who reconciled us to God. This image of the cross and resurrection is not so much about Jesus dying instead of us, or for us, but with us, again for the sake of restored relationship. That we might walk in union and communion with God. This is Jesus in his office of Prophet, who came to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth, and invite us into it. A Kingdom which we often refer to as the “upside-down” Kingdom. Which I always find funny, because from God’s perspective it is the “right-way-up” Kingdom which Jesus invites us to participate in, and proclaim. A re-ordered Kingdom, the way creation is supposed to be.

Because of the sacrifice of our great high Priest, because of the victory of our true King, we can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk the way of the cross, in the power of Jesus’ resurrection, and in the hope of the glory of the age to come. We have explored through this passage three aspects to Christ's reconciling work in his death and resurrection. In NT and early church writings, these metaphors intertwined, but throughout history we tended to develop them into models and theories, often elevating one over others. These are just some of the images the NT uses, woven together like threads in the tapestry, to create a beautiful image of what Jesus has done for us.

I appreciate this sermon has been very abstract, but as I have been preparing for it, I have fallen in love again with passages and ideas and images and metaphors of what Jesus did for us in his death and resurrection. If your understanding of the mysterious and magnificent events of Easter is tired, I invite you this morning, to take another look. To maybe explore new threads. New images and metaphors of seeing the cross and the Empty grave. For the death and resurrection of Christ, is still certainly good news. Amen.