

Somewhere along the line someone always asks: what about our blessing? Our blessing is the fruit of our obeying Jesus, the more we do what pleases Him the more we know His presence with us and His care of us. And yes we will know Gethsemane nights. We will cry out, Lord provide another way, but Thy will be done. We will have Calvary days, feeling ourselves to be without God - knowing what it is to cry out: My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? In such days stand firm in the risen Jesus for He will meet you, even if you must wait for the darkness to have its day, He will be on the shore of the sea of Galilee, blessing you with word of what to do, cooking your breakfast, ready to feed you and forgive you.

[B] Why is the Resurrection Good News? It's our human destiny

Christians are a people of hope. Despite the gloomy views many have of our earthly future there will be a happy ending, for the resurrected. We are not living time-bound journeys to the grave nor are we to fear death. When the risen Christ ascended to heaven, and the disciples looked up at His going, two angels suddenly appeared and said to them: "Men of Galilee why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven." Christ will come again and all who trust in Him we will be resurrected to new life in God's new creation. What does that mean as a bodily reality?

Firstly we need to know that our spirits and our souls, our non-flesh being survive our death. Angels will escort us to be with Jesus. Further when Christ was raised He was raised with a body, a body like our bodies. He could be touched, He could speak, He could eat. Yet a body also different from ours. He could come to us through locked doors. It was a spiritual body: so our future resurrection bodies will be.

In Eden we were created in the image of God and so there we had spiritual bodies, bodies clothed in the glory of God. But when we fell, we lost the glory of God. Our spirits shrivelled. Our being became dominated by our souls, that is our mind, thoughts and emotions and most especially by our flesh, and all its appetites. In our resurrection we will be new made in soul and body and spirit. As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:50 flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. As John tells us in his 1st letter, when Jesus appears again we shall be like Him. So in a new and more glorious way all that we lost in Eden will be restored to us, and maybe even more. We were created in the image of God and in the image of God we will be re-created. How else could we live in the constant presence of God, for no man as we are can see God and live. But in re-created spiritual-body glory we will dwell with God in His new creation.

None of us really knows what that life will be like, but let me suggest this, the new creation is most un-likely to be a giant concert/orchestra hall in which we spend eternity floating on clouds strumming harps. Rather it will be an adventure in the kingdom of God, where we will live like never before without fear, without pain, without sorrow, without any risk of death, with everything good in ourselves and around us for evil will be banished, the devil will be excluded, the bad will be barred and all forever will be a delight of love, joy and peace to the glory of God and our eternal blessing. Praise to Christ our risen Lord. Amen.



Easter Reflection 4th April 2021

[A] Matthew 28:1-10 and
[B] Why is the Resurrection Good News?

[A] Matthew 28: 1-10

Matthew tells us the good news in simple, spare and straight terms. No buy me magazine sales pitches. No human saw the resurrection. God acted. Not surprisingly, as He shook out life from death the earth itself was shaken. An angel came and rolled back the stone and sat on it as if to say so much for that. And the guards shook with fear and fell into a dead faint. But not the two Mary's who had come to anoint the body of the Lord. They had been wondering how to roll back the stone. Now its not necessary. It's been done for them. And the body of Jesus is not there, waiting for their grieving care. He has risen! He is no longer dead. By holiness and love, death has been overturned for life.

The angel tells the women to go quickly and tell Christ's disciples. He doesn't seem to have heard that the witness of women had no value in Israel. And the women ran to do so. The feet of fear, the feet of joy. Suddenly Jesus surprises them. "Greetings". They, seeing Him alive, fall at His feet, clasping them in an action of worship. The church has begun.

Jesus knowing their natural fear encourages them with God's often spoken words to those whom He suddenly meets "Do not be afraid." Then He adds to the angel's message, "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Out of Galilee, Matthew tells us some 3 years before, Jesus went to John to be baptised, to defeat the devil in the wilderness, to begin His mission to Israel. Now on the 3rd day of His death Jesus, no longer dead but alive again, is going to Galilee, Galilee of the Gentiles. Crowned on the cross, the defeater of death, is going to send out His disciples to make disciples of all nations. In Galilee of the Gentiles — the people living in darkness are seeing the great light of Christ; on them and on all who are living in the shadow of death the light has risen, death is dispelled.

Today is Easter. Jesus stands before you. You can shake in disbelief and like guards become like dead men. Or you can flee with the women into the greetings of Jesus, letting death go, clasping the feet of life. Don't be afraid. Seek Him and you will see Him, joining the blessed company of all who trust in Him, destined to live eternal life in constant love and joy and peace. May you clasp the feet of Jesus today to the glory of God and His blessing of your life. Amen

[B] Why is the Resurrection Good News? [1] It vindicates Jesus

The first and most important thing is that it vindicates Jesus. The authorities killed Jesus. Pilate killed Him to avoid upsetting the Jewish authorities for fear they would send a bad report about him to 'Tiberius the Emperor, stirring him to recall Pilate in disgrace. The

Jewish leaders killed Jesus because they envied His popularity; they couldn't defeat Him in debate; He disrupted the proper way of things, treating sinners and the sick as more precious to God than His religious leaders, and because He claimed to be God's son.

Though some of them as individuals secretly followed Jesus, most of them as a social group loathed Him and just wished He'd go away. As He wouldn't do that they decided to put Him away. They had no legal authority to execute Jesus. Only Pilate had that. So they worked on Pilate's career fear, emotionally pressuring him into crucifying Jesus. And they were very happy about that. For crucifixion was death by hanging on a symbolic tree. And that fixed it for Jesus, literally by nails and spiritually by the Law, which says that anyone who dies hung on a tree is cursed by God. The people would then come to their senses for they would never believe that God would let His own Son be crucified. As Peter was later to write the cross was a stone that caused the Jews to stumble, a rock that made them fall.

But many years before he wrote that letter, on Pentecost Sunday, Peter told the people: the patriarch David was a prophet [who] seeing what was ahead, spoke of the resurrection of the Christ; that He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did His body see decay. Peter then saying: "God has raised this Jesus to life, exalting Him to His right-hand. Let all Israel be assured of this, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." The law's verdict was over-turned by the Law's maker. All Jesus did and said is now seen to be just as He said it was, the words and actions of God His Father. Wrongly killed by man, rightly raised up by God, the false Messiah turns out to be the true Christ.

[B] Why is the Resurrection Good News? [2] It generates the church

The source of the faith that grew the church was not telling Jews of the healing work of Christ, nor offering them His teaching. These were streams that flowed from the headwaters of the resurrection. It was telling Jews and also Gentiles, as we see in Acts about the resurrection. As Paul was to write to the Corinthian Church: what he received he passed on to them, and so to us, as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the 3rd day according to the scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter and then to the 12. After that He appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom when he was writing were still living, though all have since fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles and least of all He appeared to Paul also.

God's vindication of Christ in His resurrection, breaks down all the old barriers, between death and life, between Jew and Gentile, between Israel and the world. Jesus Christ had come, and He had died, but then having been raised by God to His right hand He founds the church, a new community of all those who believe in Him, people who cease to be identified by human factors but by being God's children. And then empowering the Church by the Holy Spirit, Christ sends it out in mission to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything He has commanded.

God's community is no longer confined to the faithful Jewish children of Abraham, but is extended to include all from anywhere, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, who live by faith in Christ, not following Moses, having circumcised bodies, but men and women having circumcised hearts.

The church is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who alone brings us to faith, brings us together in unity with each other and God, and alone empowers us to take the good news to others. As Jesus tells us in John's gospel, unless He went away the Spirit would not come to us – the Spirit is poured out as a gift of the resurrection. Without the resurrection, without the consequential giving of Spirit, the Church would not exist. As Peter tells us in his 1st letter, those who preach the gospel to us do so by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is by the Spirit we become God's people. Once we were not a people but now we are the people of God; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. The Church has become God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of the darkness into His wonderful light. We are Christ's resurrection fruit.

[B] Why is the Resurrection Good News? [3] It feeds our discipleship

Discipleship is a community existence. We are not called to live together but we are called to connect together. Disciples form a new community living in the blessing of God. The Holy Spirit fills us with the presence of Christ, who calls us to live as He did for the blessing of others. We live to share the kingdom of God, and as that kingdom is received so we make disciples of those who put their trust in Jesus, for disciples disciple disciples.

The message of the resurrection is God's good news for new life today. Remember how Jesus illustrated that in His compassion for the sick and suffering. The first miracle that Matthew describes in detail is Jesus healing of a leper. The second is of a Roman soldier's servant. Why so? They express the meaning of the resurrection. The second, offering life even to the servants of despised Gentiles, expresses the risen Christ's command to go and make disciples of all who are willing to turn to Him. The first expresses the new life that is on offer to anyone through the risen Christ.

Lepers were discarded people. Banned from home and family. Barred from work and worship. Bells signalled their coming so the good people could get out of their way. No one went near them. No one touched them, for that condemned the toucher to join them. Then Jesus came. And He touched them. They were healed, while He, the holy one of God, was unstained by their sickness. Those who had been treated as the living dead were restored to life. They could go home. They could go to work. They could go to worship. No more a leper, defined by the appearance of their skin, but a human being. Resurrection.

Jesus blesses us to bless others. And their blessing begets our blessings in the joy that comes to our hearts when through us Jesus heals the sick, restores the outcast, frees the demonised, and raises the socially and the physically dead to life. As we go with Jesus in offering His Kingdom so the Lord will rescue those He is calling.