

What does the resurrection really mean for us?

An Easter message of reflection considering the resurrection of Jesus Christ and what this means for the church and our lives, as we continue to build the Kingdom of God.

4/4/21

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, who through thy only begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee, that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Amen.

The Lord is risen.

He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

An extract from today's Gospel reading:

“Don't be alarmed,” he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go; tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

(Mark 16:6)

Pastor John Ortberg tells the story of a friend of his (also a pastor named Skip Viau) who was attempting to tell the resurrection story in a children's sermon. He asked the question, "What were Jesus' first words to the disciples after he was raised from the dead?" Before he was able to give the answer, a little girl raised her hand high in the sky, so Skip let her answer. "I know," she said, "Ta da!" As Ortberg would argue, it was "as good a translation as any."

When I was doing some research for my sermon this morning I noted how much is written about the crucifixion of Jesus and very much less so on the resurrection of our Lord. In fact, a noted theologian, G.D. Yarnold, once wrote and I quote:

"While there is no lack of devotional and theological books on the Passion of Christ, there are relatively few on the Resurrection, yet the faith that 'Christ rose again the third day' has always been fundamental to the Christian creed."

There may indeed be various reasons for this.

What I do know is that without the resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday, there is no church. It is as simple as that.

The death of Christ is important in terms of our salvation BUT the resurrection of Christ is essential in terms of our Christian faith and life!

Let us take a moment this morning and consider various aspects of the resurrection of our Lord and what this means for us as a church and a Christian.

Firstly, let us consider the historical evidence of the resurrection as related to us in the Gospels...

Interestingly, the primary evidence of the fact of the resurrection is contained in the Pauline statement of the tradition in 1 Cor. 15: 1-8. However, this passage is creedal, rather than narrative in nature. This text is dated around AD 55. This text has very little detail and does not tell us much about the resurrection. Unfortunately, many of the Gospel passages are also fairly light on detail when it comes to the resurrection. If we are to understand and really

appreciate the resurrection, then we need to first reflect on how the New Testament authors viewed and understood the resurrection.

The Gospels present four separate narratives of the discovery of the empty tomb by the women. This is important, as on the Cross, death seemed to have the last word BUT the discovery of the empty tomb made possible the leap of faith which confirmed that the resurrection was not some far-off future event, but rather an event that took place in the “here and now” for the women... an ever present reality for both these women and for us! He is risen. Christ’s victory is complete. So it becomes clear that the grave of Jesus has no power over him. The grave clothes left behind become evidence of his triumph over death. This is our Easter faith!

We also have recounts in the Gospels of how Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. It is significant that Jesus chose to first appear to a woman. Mary Magdalene was absolutely distraught with the death of Jesus and Jesus honoured her by appearing to her first and removing her grief and pain.

Jesus also then appears to the two disciples at Emmaus. Here Jesus is preparing his disciples for the final withdrawal of His visible presence and teaching them that from now on His abiding presence will be found in a new manner – in our hearts.

Jesus also appears to the disciples in the Upper Room. This meeting is essential, as it lays the groundwork for the creation of the Apostolate as the active, authoritative nucleus of the new Israel.

Jesus also appears on the lakeside. It is here that Jesus says those famous words, “Come and follow me.” This becomes a vocational call to both us and the disciples to continue to follow Christ, even after His death and resurrection.

Jesus also appears to Paul on the road to Damascus, as well at the Ascension.

In conclusion of my first point, it could perhaps be suggested that the biggest evidence for the resurrection of Christ is the survival and growth of the Christian Church over the last two thousand years!

Secondly, let us take a moment this morning and consider what the resurrection of Jesus means for both the church and us.

The Christian community owes its existence to the total act of God in Christ, which is expressed in the sequence of Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost. The Risen Christ is eternally present in His Church through the indwelling and empowering Spirit. Christian living begins with Christ's dying and rising again; and right living grows out of right worship.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, that you and I celebrate today, is also a celebration of hope. Hope in love. Hope in faith. Hope in life. Hope in the good. Hope in the light. Hope in every way possible that we can imagine. It is our reminder that Jesus has conquered the world and that we have nothing to fear. He is bigger than all that the world can throw at both Him and us. The resurrection brings us new life, a new chance, a new start and a new beginning.

Thomas Merton once wrote:

“So we are called not only to believe that Christ once rose from the dead, thereby proving that he was God; we are called to experience the Resurrection in our own lives by entering into this dynamic movement, by following Christ who lives in us. This life, this dynamism, is expressed by the power and love of encounter. Christ lives in us if we love one another. And our love for one another means involvement in one another's history.”

I am reminded of the old Celtic quote that goes as follows...

“Let your feet follow your heart until you find your place of resurrection.”

I wish you your own “ta-da” moment this Easter as you contemplate the resurrection of our Lord and all that this means both for your life and the life of the church.

I also wish you a peaceful and joyful Sunday.

The Lord is risen.

He is risen indeed.

Hallelulah.

