

Luke 20:27-38

Christianity is a resurrection faith. That is the message of this morning's readings: of Job's defiant cry in the midst of his suffering, of Jesus' battle of wits with the Sadducees. We are people who, as the Nicene Creed puts it, look for the resurrection of the dead. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead - not as a metaphor but as an actual historical event - and more than that, we believe that through Jesus we too will one day be resurrected. That we ourselves will know the risen, eternal life.

This is our faith.

And so the resurrection, the thing that the Sadducees were so keen to dismiss with their clever arguments and materialistic outlook, is not just a nice idea - it is the very centre of Christian hope. We are not Christians without it.

But what does that mean for us today, is this just pie in the sky when we die? Or does it have real meaning - does the truth of the resurrection make any difference to our lives?

Let me say this, believing in the resurrection - both Christ's and our own - does not mean that we ignore suffering and death. Believing in the resurrection does not mean that we have to pretend that there is no such thing as pain or loss. Those things remain: life will have its hardships - even pain. Death remains a terrible mystery - and the loss we experience when someone dies is real and deep. Our grief is true.

But, because of the resurrection, we also have hope in the midst of suffering, in the face of grief. Because the resurrection tells us that those things are not the end of the story. That there is more to come - history has a goal, a purpose, and we have hope.

So the Bible tells us that death is our enemy, but it also tells us that death is defeated. Because it no longer gets the final word, because death is not the ultimate truth. For the ultimate truth is the resurrection life that Jesus brings.

One theologian explains it like this:

The Resurrection [of Jesus] shows us - it doesn't just leave us hoping, it shows us - that God will ultimately triumph, that creation will not be discarded but will... be reaffirmed and renewed and restored, that death will finally be overcome,

[it shows us] that the relationships for which we are made and because of which life is worth living do not come to a cul-de-sac in the grave...

[it shows us] that evil and suffering will not forever blight our world... that injustice and oppression... and decay and death and sorrow... and brokenness are finite - whereas Life and Love and Beauty and Glory and Joy are eternal.

To be a resurrection people, to hold a resurrection faith, is to know there is hope even in the face of deep darkness - even in the abyss hope remains - because that is not the end.

History isn't just a random set of stories, life is not some freak result of chance and accident. Our universe is going somewhere, history has a direction, life has a destination - and God is at work to bring us safely to the golden shore.

But that is not all. To be a resurrection people means not just knowing where we are going, but who we will be when we get there - that is what makes the hope so great, so profound. For the resurrection is also the promise of our transformation.

C.S. Lewis once said, *"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal..."* And what he meant was - if we saw people now as they will be then, after we have been resurrected in Christ, we would be overwhelmed in their presence, in the glory which they revealed.

Because to be resurrected is to be healed, it is to be restored, it is to be made new without our brokenness, without our pain or our shame. It means that we finally become who God created us to be, that we get to be fully ourselves - and that we get to share in his glory.

It's almost beyond our comprehension just how fully alive, whole and complete we will one day become.

As Lewis again said the difference between this life and the next will be as great as the difference between a two-dimensional shadow and the three-dimensional living person casting it.

Does this mean that we can forget about this life or that it doesn't matter? Not at all, this life matters even more in the light of what is to come. And we should not pretend that the world to come has already arrived in its fullness, that we are already resurrected, that the final restoration of things has already taken place.

We live in a time of waiting for those things.

But at the same time, we must not live as if nothing has changed. For Christ's resurrection has brought with it a new age, one with new power, new promise, new possibilities. So our job now is to live in such a way as to point in the direction that we are heading: to be more and more the sort of people we shall be then, to live lives worthy of the coming Kingdom of God - and not of this passing age.

We are people of eternity - how then should we live.

Billy Graham, the great evangelist once said, "if you ever read in the newspaper that I have died, don't you believe it - not for a second. I have simply changed my address."

As Jesus reminds us once again in this morning's Gospel, there is more to life than what exists on this side of death.

We are a resurrection faith.

We believe in Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

We believe in God's kingdom come.

We believe in a world without end.

Amen

Archdeacon Peter Jenkins

