

Sunday 21st July

**Creed sermon 7
Resurrection**

Psalm 16:5-11

1 Corinthians 15:12-22

Luke 24:1-12

We are in Russia in the 1920s. The Revolution has happened and the Marxist Government is well established. The thought is that communism is about to spread across the globe. Nikolai Bukharin, one of the key members of the Politburo, is a great Marxist theoretician and orator. He often speaks to large crowds about communism and the latest theories that are to be believed.

He is in Kiev, then in the heart of Russia, addressing a crowd at one of many anti-God rallies as he seeks to convince the people that communism is the true religion, and that notions of God and Christianity are outdated and bourgeoisie.

He speaks for an hour, giving great and lengthy arguments and pouring ridicule on the Christian faith.

At the end there is silence. He has, he is sure, won the argument. He sits down, content.

Questions are invited, but none expected. Who could possibly dare ask anything of this great man?

But an old man slowly steps forward, dressed in robes, the robes of a priest. He mounts the platform and looks at the crowd of ordinary folk who have heard the great man speak.

In a loud, clear, unfaltering voice he calls out the traditional Easter greeting "Christ is risen" . Instantly the crowd calls back the response "he is risen indeed!"

That Easter greeting always fills me with joy.

Our tradition in this parish has been to gather at sunrise on Easter morning in the garden at St John's. The sun is beginning to rise. The birds are singing. A fire is lit. We light a taper from the fire and light the three Easter candles – one for each of the churches in the parish. Easter candles to signify the light of Christ.

The call is “Alleluia Christ is risen!” and we all respond with “He is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

The resurrection is at the heart of the Christian faith, and today we come to a short phrase at the very heart of the Creed which outlines our belief in the resurrection

On the third day he rose again, in accordance with the scriptures

Having affirmed that Jesus well and truly died - we thought last week about how the creed places his death in the context of human history by its mention of Pontius Pilate – the creed now states just as certainly that he rose again. No ifs or buts. On the third day he rose again.

For the resurrection there is no historical marker in the creed, no “under Pontius Pilate”, to emphasise its truth. Indeed the main players in history of the time – the Romans and the Jews – were trying to deny the resurrection because of the implications of such an event. This time the creed turns to scripture to back it up.

We read of the resurrection in scripture. The Easter stories including Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb, the two disciples on the Emmaus road; the upper room appearances first without and then with Thomas; the breakfast on the beach as Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him; the stories of the ascension and the history of the early church in Acts. This is what marks the resurrection out as a true event. People wrote about it and thousands lived out their lives in the light of it. Men and women put their very lives in danger on the strength of it; the disciples were changed from a scared group of individuals hiding in a locked room to fearless witnesses willing to stand up to the authorities and address great crowds, willing to face up to persecution and suffering and even death for the sake of it.

When the creed says “in accordance with the scriptures” this is I think what it is getting at. There are hints of the resurrection in the Old Testament, but to me it’s the evidence of changed lives and new confidence that underline its truth.

But what does the resurrection mean for Christians today? What does this simple line in the creed mean for you and for me?

As Christians we often talk about being saved by the cross. Our Holy Communion service or Eucharist focusses on Jesus saying “this is my body” and “this is my blood” – focusses on his sacrificial death. There are countless hymns and songs which focus entirely on the cross and the crucifixion – when I survey, The old rugged cross, lift high the cross etc etc

And that is right. But if the cross brings our salvation; if we are put right with God by the cross; if our sins are forgiven by virtue of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross (something we were thinking about last week) – what is the Resurrection all about? Why do we need anything more than the death of Jesus?

By his death on the cross we are given the opportunity to be put right with God; the past is dealt with; we have been given the chance to start afresh with a clean sheet; given the opportunity to enter into a restored relationship with him. All we have to do is say yes.

But the resurrection looks to the future.

Our New Testament reading today tells of Paul's argument that because Christ rose from the dead, the resurrection is a reality for us too. Death will not have the final word – it has been defeated. There is life beyond the grave. He goes on to say If we are not raised – if there is not eternal life – then our faith is next to useless. The resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrections are tied together.

The temptation is to think then, that this only affects us when we die. We don't need to worry about resurrection until we are dead. And in one sense that's true – it will affect us when we die. Jesus' resurrection points forward to the redemption of the whole world. Not just people, but the whole of creation. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. A new physical perfect reality where God will reign. The resurrection points us towards and is a guarantee of the fact that in the end good will win; love will win; God will be victorious. This is the great promise of scripture.

But the resurrection also affects us in the here and now, in our daily lives. The cross says that we are saved from sin and can have a new relationship with God. Resurrection is concerned with what we are saved for, what that relationship will be like. We are saved for a new life as part of God's people in God's Kingdom; saved for a new life in relationship with God; saved to part of the new life that Jesus promised – a life that begins now and lasts into eternity.

And its this "now" time that Jesus was talking about in his teaching about abundant life, fullness of life and the kingdom of God. When he said words like - you are not far from the Kingdom; the Kingdom of God is among you; the Kingdom of God is at hand. Fullness of life that begins now and goes on into eternity. Life as it was always meant to be. In the presence of God and for God.

The resurrection gives us the opportunity to live new lives as citizens of the Kingdom of God. To live according to God's values, according to God's teaching, empowered

and inspired by God. Having been reunited with God as forgiven people, the resurrection gives us the opportunity to have the abundant life Jesus talks about, fullness of life. Now. Not just in the future but now.

But that fullness of life does not mean there won't be difficulties, or challenges. Sometimes life will be tough. It may well be that it seems every day brings a new, and perhaps a harder challenge. But what we are promised is that because the resurrection follows the cross the future is secure; God will have the victory; good will triumph over evil; love will be the force that endures.

Sometimes it might not feel like that. Sometimes the darkness can be overwhelming. Sometimes it might seem that all hope is extinguished. Its at times like this when we need to remind ourselves of the truth that Easter Day follows Good Friday; the resurrection follows crucifixion. Life will come out of death.

Perhaps as we look back over our lives we can see this truth. Perhaps we can recall bad times, really challenging and difficult time, from which God brought new opportunities; new beginnings. That is not saying the bad times were God's will, but that he brought good through them and from them. Mini resurrections if you like.

Our current lives in God's presence may not be perfect; things go wrong; we make mistakes and we get hurt but there are at least glimpses of the kinds of lives God wants us to live. There are times when people look at us and see something of God. There are times when we in some small way point others towards God

We saw this earlier this in the post resurrection lives of the disciples. The Acts of the apostles is all about this. The letters of Paul testify to it. The history of the church reflects that Kingdom lives can be lived now, albeit not in perfection. That something of God can be seen in the thoughts, words and deeds of Christian people like you and me as we live now, not perfect lives by any means – we never will be in this world - but in anticipation and hope of the final resurrection.

So the message of resurrection is that life doesn't have to be as it always has been; we can all live our lives to the full as God intended. Knowing God, being certain of sins being forgiven and being transformed to follow the example of Jesus in the here and now as we wait the final resurrection in time to come. And that surely is something worth celebrating.

Alleluia – Christ is Risen!