

Third Sunday of Easter 2021 (18.04.2021)

Acts 3: 12 – 19; Luke 24: 36b – 48

A fortnight ago, on Easter Day, we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus. We acclaimed “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!” And we renewed our baptismal vows as we re-committed ourselves to living a resurrection life. Well, today we have to buckle down and begin to unpackage a bit of what living a resurrection life might mean and look like.

There are all sorts of different ways of thinking about the significance of what was achieved by the events of Easter. Many of them involve an idea of some sort of transaction occurring on the cross: Jesus did something on the cross through which we get salvation. It may be he received punishment or paid a debt or whatever. Each of these different ways of thinking about it has their usefulness. Each can very affectively mediate the salvation we receive through Jesus for different people in different circumstances. I

don't want to knock any of those ideas or metaphors. It may be that one of them is very precious to the self-understanding of faith of someone sitting in church or joining from home.

What I *do* want to point out is that Saint Peter doesn't use any of them in the major speech reported in Acts that we've just heard. He simply says: forces of oppression killed Jesus; God raised him. You can't keep Jesus dead. God won't allow it. And God is stronger than all the forces that crucified him. What is preached is not that Jesus is not that Jesus did something on the cross, but that God raised Jesus from the dead. That's the good news.

And that's the risen Jesus we meet in our Gospel reading from Luke's Gospel. It's the same Jesus who was alive, was then crucified and has now been raised from the dead. The disciples thought he was a ghost and he assured them he was not. They could see him; they could touch him; and the clinching argument: he

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eats broiled fish – because we all know, ghosts don't eat broiled fish. It comes across almost as a bit of a comedy moment, but of course, it's not. This is the bodily appearance of a body which has bodily functions. There is continuity between pre-crucifixion and post-crucifixion because of God's power.

And that continuity means that there is continuity between the resurrection life *in which each of us is invited to participate* and the earthly ministry of Jesus leading up to his resurrection. Living the resurrection life is not so much about being on a spiritual trip, because the resurrected Jesus is not a spirit or a ghost. The resurrected life is about participating in what the living Jesus did. In his earthly ministry Jesus wasn't simply filling in time, hanging around, waiting to do the work of salvation on the cross. It is all an integral part of his work of salvation. It discloses his salvation.

And Jesus told those apostles, in the resurrection appearance we've just heard read, that his resurrection is the fulfilment of the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms. That doesn't mean that those things were a prediction of Jesus. It means that, for Christians, those scriptures are a continually unfolding and consistent revelation of the type of salvation that Jesus gives us.

So, living the resurrection life is as much about stewarding God's creation in partnership with him, keeping the Ten Commandments and honouring the orphan & widow, and the stranger in our midst, as it is about continuing the pattern of life that Jesus modelled for us: bringing good news to the poor; proclaiming release from captivity and oppression; removing blindness; keeping bad company; and breaking social and religious taboos.

Jesus also showed the apostles his hands and his feet. This is the other continuity in this resurrection

appearance: the risen Christ is crucified Christ; the risen Christ is the wounded Christ; the risen Christ is the suffering Christ. This is a theme I've traditionally warmed to. The words I finished last week's sermon with were: "We will work out how faithfully to live Christ's story after 2021 not despite our fragility and woundedness, but because of our fragility and woundedness."

This week, though, I've been challenged about this, not by anything theological, but by some lectures in political philosophy I've been reading¹. The concern is that if you identify with suffering, you are reinforcing and legitimising the forces of oppression. You can't have an underdog unless there is also a top dog. So you're acknowledging the top dog by standing alongside the underdog. This is the perennial dilemma thrown up by feeding the homeless: when we feed the homeless, are we simply being complicit in

making homelessness work? Are we letting the policy makers off the hook because they can rely on do-gooders to ensure the homeless have a hot meal inside them?

Well, part of the way we resolve that dilemma is that we don't just feed the homeless: we also challenge the unjust structures that create and perpetuate homelessness. And of course, both are examples of the Anglican Five Marks of Mission. This is what being a Christian is about.

But also, strange to say, Christians are undeterred by the dilemma. Because we don't believe in utopia. We don't believe there ever can be a political programme that will make everything perfect. Neither do we believe in an old man in the sky who treats prayer like a magic wish list. We know it's never going to be perfect, because we take sin seriously. It may sound old fashioned, but actually it's what makes it real. The message of both our readings, from Acts and from

¹ Mark Fisher, ed. Matt Colquhoun: Post Capitalist Desire [2021] Repeater Books London

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Luke is: Jesus died; God raised him from the dead; therefore repent! Repentance is nothing to do with beating ourselves up for being bad people. Repentance is simply about turning to God, seeing the suffering, risen Christ in our midst and being empowered, because his suffering is dynamic and transformative, shot through with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.