

Sermon on Easter morning, 31 March 2024

by Rev. Alan Stewart



'He is risen indeed!... so what?'

Christ is risen! ... he is risen indeed! Alleluia

He is risen indeed... ... so what? ... so ... what?

Even if we can somehow suspend our logic; for a moment dare to believe in the impossible; so what?

So what if one man in the whole scheme of human history gets a 'Comeback from the dead free' card? What's the big deal?

What's the point in celebrating ancient history?

What has two thousand years of believing this actually achieved?

What real difference does a resurrection make to you and me; here and now? What's in it for the lone parent going hungry today so her kids can eat? Or for any poor soul trapped in their own Good Friday?

What real difference can a one-off return from death make to our and *their* past, present and future? And, while we're at it, what difference could it possibly make to the future of this fragile planet we call home?

If God really did break his own rules once, all those years ago reversed the irreversible, well then why doesn't he do it again?

Christ is risen... so what?

The apostle Paul, for one, thought that the resurrection was a very big deal indeed. In fact, he bet everything he had on it; anything that's worth believing in, he said, stands or falls on the truth or otherwise of this one historical event. If it didn't happen, then let's pack up any faith or hope and call it a day. But why, why was the physical resurrection of Christ so significant; so crucial?

The truth is that resurrection isn't a two-thousand-year-old, one-off novelty. Resurrection is actually written into the hard-drive of the universe; it's sewn into the very fabric of life.

If you don't believe me, look at our own DNA, programmed to heal broken skin and fuse broken bones. Or look at the power of nature to recover from the desolation of drought and fire. It's there in the butterfly emerging from the chrysalis; in the collapsed marriage which somehow finds reserves of courage and forgiveness; in communities which somehow, following the closure of industries that were their life-blood, manage to recover some sense of self-respect.

Resurrection has always been, and always will be, but it took Jesus of Nazareth to reveal it, to set in motion its power; a power that changes worlds.

The resurrection of Jesus reveals the truth. And the truth is that despite all appearances to the contrary; despite the gathering darkness, the most venomous hate, the damndest of lies ... none of these in the end will have the last word. The last word will always belong to resurrection; the good will always out; light will eventually evict the darkness, in the end love will win.

Not even cruel, callous death has the final say. Resurrection tore the fear, the sting, from death by revealing that there is a life and a light that can never be put out.

In his time, Jesus made some big claims for himself; among them the enigmatic, 'I am the resurrection' ... 'I have come that you might have life; in all its fullness and reality'.

What might that full and real resurrection life look like?

The good news is that it needn't be very much at all to do with religion.

'It has long been my conviction,' wrote Bishop John V Taylor a few decades ago, 'that God is not hugely concerned with whether we are religious or not. What matters to God, and matters supremely, is whether we are alive or not.'

Religion (and by religion, I mean dogma and institutions) can too easily nail life down, keep God firmly in his place and keep us from actually living while we are alive.

Is the faith many of us adhere to bringing us to life? Or is it subtly diminishing us, corroding our passion and joy and uniqueness and edge?

Real life is about becoming more of who we were created to be, and that identity and quality of life can only be discovered as we move towards the one who first gave us life.

In his light, we begin to see life. We begin to differentiate between what is essential and unessential. We begin to know something of the power of the resurrection to mend and heal and forgive and create.

But it doesn't come cheap. Resurrection for Jesus came via the cross. This life Jesus promised isn't about avoiding the realities of life; it's about finding a way through the darkness and the tragedy and the mess.

If Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection', then it follows that we, his body now on earth, we are the resurrection. That ancient power which fuels the universe should be revealed in you and in me. Frail, limping, imperfect, of course, but if our lives do not reveal the resurrection, then we have no business preaching it.

I began with a whole list of questions which I haven't even begun to respond to because, truth be told, I'm still working them out for myself. What I do, however, know for sure, is that the resurrection is real because I've seen it ... in many of you.

This resurrection day, may its truth melt our cynicism and scaffold our faith.

May its reality empower our dreams and fire our imaginations.

May its power fill us with courage and banish all fear; its hope heighten our expectations and breathe through our prayers; its light deepen our compassion and lighten our footprint; its company hold us through doubt and drought.

This day, and every day, may the resurrection bring us and all of creation back to life, because Christ ***is*** risen! ... he is risen indeed, alleluia!