

EASTER DAY 4th April 2021

Acts 10:34-43 [John 20:1-18] Mark 16:1-8

Before I begin, I would like to share that 4th April is the day we remember Martin Luther King's death and his struggles for American Civil Rights. Praise the Lord for Martin.

May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

'Start anew!' That's what I said to myself when words for Easter Day's sermon would not meld. In that moment, I realised they were a resurrection statement! Start anew!

So, what does it mean, this word, 'resurrection'? The dictionary claims multiple meanings...I quote: '*resurrection*' is a noun meaning, '*the action or fact of resurrecting or being resurrected*'. I didn't find that very helpful. Definitions for Christianity are: '*raising from the dead*' or '*restoration to life*'. There are, of course, further meanings in the cultures and religions of the world.

I reflected on the phrases '*raising from the dead*' and '*restoration to life*'. I thought the first phrase, '*raising from the dead*' could be a logical and scientific reason for post-modernist Christians proposing Jesus' bodily resurrection did not happen. For me, the second phrase '*restoration to life*' dramatically changes this trajectory and breaks 'resurrection' wide open, if you'll pardon the pun. Franciscan, Father Richard Rohr wrote, '*We are already in the presence of God. What is missing is awareness*'. Rohr's life, work and writings speak volumes about 'restoration to life' in, as he calls it, an '*already Christ-soaked world*'.

Scripture enlightens us...we heard St Luke, in Acts, quoting Peter's restorative speech, and Mark's witness facts. In all four Gospels, Jesus told the disciples that his body would be raised but they, like us, were unable to understand what he was talking about until after resurrection. John 2:22 states: '*After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*' And, this is the point! We aren't meant to understand, we are invited to believe, both Scripture and Jesus, after the event.

Peter's speech, for example, is a succinct and factual reminder of this. ³⁶ **You know** the message God has sent,' he proclaims. ³⁷ **You know** what has happened. ³⁸ **You know** about God anointing Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. **You know** how Jesus went everywhere doing good and healing.' Peter's concern, we then hear, was for future disciples, for those of us who had not been there or had the opportunity to speak with witnesses who were still alive when he wrote, including you and

me! How restorative to know of Peter's concern for us! *'Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden in Christ!'*

Mark's Gospel tells us, abruptly, that, after Sabbath, three women brought spices to the tomb. Let's wonder for a moment about their conversation. I'm sure they did not say, 'I wonder what resurrection looks like; Jesus always said this would happen'. Instead, they asked, 'How are we going to roll away that stone?'

If that was prayer, there was an immediate answer. Did they then stop and say, 'I wonder what resurrection looks like? Jesus always said this would happen' No! Astounded, they walked into the tomb, saw a man in white and listened as he announced,

'Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified, is not here! He has been raised! Go and tell the others...you'll see Jesus in Galilee, just like he told you!'

The women no longer needed to ask what resurrection looked like because now they knew. They were in shock! Their bodies trembled, they were stunned into silence and flight mode took over. Mark's final verse is not now so unhelpful because through his account we are witnesses and can feel their shock as I just have at the Dawn Service in Durley Churchyard! Theologian Tom Wright suggests that, if the last page of Mark's Gospel has been lost over time, the abruptness of this ending causes us to want to know more, to search, to find out for ourselves what happened next. It is an open invitation for 'restoration to life'.

So, what about us? Are we closer to knowing resurrection as 'restoration to life' this Easter morning? I, for one, am amazed that I wake up every morning! I stop and give thanks! Although a family member has just been moved into a hospice, I offer him to God in trust. I give thanks for him, his children and family, the nurses and palliative care because, despite the pain, I believe in an *'already Christ-soaked world'*.

Who are we without resurrection? Without resurrection we would be a people of the past, not of the future. *'Restoration to life'* is about what happens next, even when everything has changed beyond our grasp. God teaches us this in many and often extreme ways: through pain, loss, even despair but also through the beauty of Nature, Family and Friendships, Justice and Peace. Jesus explored and shared these things through his life, death and resurrection so we could be restored to life, life in abundance. The Holy Spirit speaks through Saints, Martyrs, Religious and Spiritual teachers down the ages, all of whom have shared their 'restoration to life' stories.

I wonder...what would change if we embraced a '*Christ-soaked world*'? It won't be pain-free, as the Stations of the Cross revealed last Wednesday. It will cost everything but when, like the women, breathless from running from tomb to home, we recover from the shock, we can embrace a restored life, pushing like new shoots through concrete, as we shared in March's 'Days of Prayer'.

Lutheran Pastor, Nadia Boltz-Weber puts it like this, '*Resurrection never feels like being made nice and clean...it's about God making us new. New looks like every fresh start, every act of forgiveness and every moment of letting go of what we thought we couldn't live without and then somehow living without it anyway. New is the thing we never saw coming – never even hoped for – but ends up being what we needed all along. God simply keeps reaching down into the dirt of humanity and resurrecting it from the graves we dig ourselves through our violence, our lies, our selfishness, our arrogance and our addictions. And God keeps loving us back to life over and over.*' [Cranky, Beautiful, Faith page 174]

So...let's start anew today!

Let us pray:

Living Lord, whose love displaced the gravity of stone; you entrusted women who loved beyond death, the news of resurrection: we praise you for the open gospel which ends where Easter faith begins; accept our fear, our disbelief and take us into this new world led by the risen Son, through Jesus Christ, first born of the dead. Amen.