

The Intimate Realism of the Resurrection

Acts 10.34-43

1 Corinthians 15.19-26

Luke 24.1-12

On this holiest of days we are gathered to celebrate what it means to be the people of God. We are above all an Easter people. We do not live simply in the light of the cross. Why look to the cross when Christ is not there? Why look to the tomb when it is empty? He is not to be found among the dead. Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed.

It can be tempting to think of the cross as the real centre of our faith; as what is most realistic. By contrast, the bodily resurrection of Christ seems fanciful. But no, while holding on to the realism of the cross, of suffering and death, we go beyond them. What is most real is resurrection life. What is shown on the cross: Jesus' gift of himself in love for the sake of others is, in the resurrection, confirmed in the most startling way. In Christ's rising from the dead everything is changed. Easter is the dawn of a new and everlasting realism. What is most realistic is a love shown even unto death; a real love that death cannot overcome; a love that really overcomes death.

The realism of Jesus' bodily resurrection is the core challenge and hope of our faith. This is no mere metaphor, no simple symbol, no made-up story, or disembodied idealism. The empty tomb announces with incomparable realism that God is committed to our

whole existence: our bodies as well as our souls; our hearts of flesh as well as our minds. The realism of Jesus' resurrection body puts on notice the forces in our world that undermine bodily existence. Jesus' resurrection challenges any spirituality that seeks to escape our tangible world. It challenges how contemporary culture undervalues the real in favour of the virtual. It also questions a narrow realism that focuses on the practical and the mundane to the exclusion of the spiritual reality expressed by our bodies.

In Jesus crucified and risen the reality of God's creative action has broken into our material world, filling it with life-giving spirit, transforming all our metaphors and symbols, our stories and ideals, our practical concern and worries – calling them to work for the fragile dignity our embodied existence. In the resurrection the very texture of our world overflows with God's presence where the material and spiritual are interwoven, where God's transcendence stoops down to the ordinary and wells up out of the ordinary. This means that the most intimate aspect of our lives, all the things we do because we have bodies, take on a new depth of reality.

We see this in our Gospel. The resurrection comes to the first disciples not as some universal disclosure, but through intimate encounters. In the terrified and reverent hearts of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women. In their remembering of the voice of Jesus. In their words of wonder as

spoken to the apostles. In the energy coursing through Peter's legs and body as he runs to the tomb and in his heartfelt amazement as he returns home.

The realism of the resurrection *is* the realism of personal encounter, of meeting face-to-face, body-to-body. Here we must distinguish Christ's resurrection from images drawn from the natural world which see life and death as an ongoing process. While there is much richness in how nature brings new life out of death, colour and vibrancy where previously there was desert waste, the problem is that there is no intimacy here. The personal is lost. There is no real tragedy. No genuine surprise or joy as the personal is regained and vindicated beyond death.

Each celebration of Easter plunges us back into the intimate wellspring of life; into the renewing waters of baptism. Just as the disciples on the first Easter day, we must encounter the realism of the new life of the resurrection by sharing it afresh through personal witness. Resurrection takes place in the exchanges between concrete people of flesh and blood whose names and stories can never be sacrificed to a mere process.

But Jesus' resurrection is not merely a return to the same body, the same old life. Jesus' resurrected body is a leaven that sends a ripple of living flame through all matter. The resurrection is the event where the transformation of matter begins. Matter is awoken and

called to work towards a greater realism. Matter is given its true vocation: to become an intimate gift of personal love expressed in bodies.

Easter reveals what Jesus already anticipated at the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday. Through Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, all are invited to partake in this loving vocation of matter. The bread and wine offered by Jesus as intimate, personal material gifts are one with the life-giving gift of his body and blood on the cross. The Eucharist makes us co-workers in the intimate realism of the resurrection as we are brought together as a living body through communion in Christ. Nourished on this realism we are enlivened as individuals and as a people to build a more real world founded on loving service. The realism of the resurrection spills over into and animates every aspect of our lives – our homes, our places of work, our government institutions, our buildings, our art, etc.... This is a world made more real by loving bodies.

But it is in particular where love is absent, where there is suffering, injustice, violence, dying and death, that the realism of the resurrection calls out for our personal and fully bodied response.

It is here that the truth of the cross shines out with reality of the resurrection. For it is in when we meet the cry of suffering with the realism of love that we declare God's commitment to the personal and embodied. For as an Easter people, we are marked most

fundamentally by the life-giving joy of a love stronger than death. We are an Easter people called to celebrate the joy of others and rejoice wherever there is love. We are an Easter people called to love even more fiercely, even more tenderly whenever we are faced with violence, suffering and death. We are an Easter people who, with our hearts and bodies transformed by Christ's resurrection body, are called to show how every body matters.