

## ***The Threat of Resurrection***

St Philip's Anglican Church O'Connor

Fifth Sunday in Lent Year B — 26 March 2023

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*Ezekiel 37.1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8.6-11; John 11.1-45.*

As I have mentioned to you on a number of occasions, though I wouldn't describe my youth as completely misspent, I did have my moments. Friday and Saturday nights particularly, even in Lent! My later teenage years were spent in the era of the Discotheque, and how we enjoyed ourselves, strutting our stuff! At the Gentlemen's group on Tuesday, we discussed the importance of liturgy in our lives, both religious and secular. The Disco was a form of liturgy, with its music, its dress, actions, community, joy, and hope. Our saints were the bands of Motown, Earth, Wind and Fire, Brothers Johnson I recall was a favourite, and folk like Stevie Wonder and Donna Summer. In 1974 a German-Caribbean group burst on the scene called on 'Boney M' and in 1978 they released a single called by the 'Rivers of Babylon!' So, on Saturday evenings you could often find me dancing to Psalm 137! See...not a completely misspent youth! Words from Psalm 19 which I just recited 'may the words of my mouth...' were also woven into this disco hit.

But if you look at the words of Psalm 137 you will discover the despair of the Jewish people deported to a foreign land. You will read of unmitigated grief, loss, trauma, and desire for vengeance. These are a people as good as dead; Ezekiel writes about them today in the wonderful story of the valley of the dry bones. This event of deportation and exile, the loss of identity is seared into the collective consciousness of the Jewish people. To understand this is to understand the Jewish people, both in the time of Jesus and to some extent even today. To understand this is to understand their religion and sense of identity. In the New Testament the people of Israel will do almost anything to retain the purity of this identity, in the gospels we see this time and time again in Jesus' ministry of healing and reconciling, giving people back the identity that is rightfully theirs. The life of Jesus is an embodiment of this identity; Jesus takes upon himself the grief and loss and trauma of the people. Ultimately of course he confronts the desire for vengeance and defeats it. He reveals a new way, a new life, a renewed identity; the way things were meant to be. Many of course in Jesus' time did not grasp this new way, and he suffered for it.

In the story of the raising of Lazarus we see not a resurrection but a resuscitation. Lazarus is restored to life, but he will eventually go on and die (we presume) a natural death. Jesus uses this opportunity—as he says, to glorify God, to demonstrate God's power and authority even over death. Lazarus has to be dead and even decomposing before Jesus will attend because he needs to demonstrate the God's power, a power that says even death, even the stench—sure signs of ritual uncleanness, do not prevent a person from claiming their identity as one of God's people.

Those of you who were at yesterday's second seminar would recall we saw an interview with the American author and Quaker Parker Palmer, he had some very interesting things to say about resurrection. He suggested that resurrection was not just a 'one off' end of life experience. It was something that can be experienced in this life and is indeed a way of life. He spoke candidly about his own battles with his mental health and the dark places he had experienced. But he spoke too about the renewal he had felt and lived. He quoted a Guatemalan poet, theologian and human rights activist named Julia Esquivel. Guatemala has seen it fair share of political upheaval and violence, she wrote a fascinating poem called 'They have threatened us with Resurrection.' It is a long poem, but I would like to read a short excerpt. [The mention of 1954 relates to a Coup that overthrew the Government].

What keeps us from sleeping  
is that they have threatened us with Resurrection!  
Because every evening  
though weary of killings,  
an endless inventory since 1954,  
yet we go on loving life  
and do not accept their death!

They have threatened us with Resurrection  
Because we have felt their inert bodies,  
and their souls penetrated ours  
doubly fortified,  
because in this marathon of Hope,  
there are always others to relieve us  
who carry the strength  
to reach the finish line  
which lies beyond death.

They have threatened us with Resurrection  
because they will not be able to take away from us  
their bodies,  
their souls,  
their strength,  
their spirit,  
nor even their death  
and least of all their life.  
Because they live  
today, tomorrow, and always  
in the streets baptized with their blood,  
in the air that absorbed their cry,  
in the jungle that hid their shadows,  
in the river that gathered up their laughter,  
in the ocean that holds their secrets,  
in the craters of the volcanoes,  
Pyramids of the New Day,  
which swallowed up their ashes.

For Julia Esquivel as the threat of the loss of identity becomes more and more profound so does the 'threat' as she puts it, of resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is ours too according to Paul. 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.'

What we are about in Lent is understanding our identity 'in Christ' and understanding what that might mean. Yesterday we began to grapple with what 'Missional Spirituality' actually looks like. It is not doing more or being more pious, it is actually about being more alive. This opens up possibilities of liturgy in its fullest sense... a way of life, perhaps it even involves doing your thing at the disco or whatever that looks like 2023!

There is much in our world today that threatens our identity, the story of the Jewish people in exile is our story too, along with unmitigated grief, loss, trauma and yes, even desire for vengeance. We might be tempted to despair from time to time. But the hope of living 'in Christ' tells us that any threat to our identity in whatever form, is also a threat of resurrection. As Paul wrote later in chapter eight: nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Amen.