

Easter Vigil 2019

Getting involved in Army PT means I get to see a lot of tattoos! Some of them are quite intriguing, what is interesting how many folk have tattoo of a cross.

Now St Paul is not the easiest author to engage with, to say the least! Perhaps more than any other Biblical writer he has suffered from a rather superficial reading of his letters to the communities he has founded. A pillar of Paul's thinking which has influenced Christian thought is the doctrine of 'Justification by Faith,' in other words we are made right with God by our faith, not by our adherence to law or by good deeds. In other words are justified by God. We are made one with God by our faith in Christ crucified **and** risen. This means that we don't have to go about justify ourselves, because when we do this we immediately splinter into groups; exactly what Paul was trying to prevent. When we are justified by God there is a universality, a catholicity, a givenness of salvation; our identity is built on this, as I said on Palm Sunday our identity is 'in Christ.' And 'in Christ' there is no division. This is what Paul was on about in his letter to the Romans and eventually we hear those words we heard this morning: Do you not know! And he goes on to tell the Romans that in baptism we share in his death **and** resurrection, it is not all about us, we don't have to justify ourselves! His words on the resurrection are important for us to hear, in this age of identity.

I doubt that Paul would have a cross around his neck or tattooed on his arm! He seems to have the greatest difficulty in preaching the cross. This he says has made him a laughing stock; the Jews looked for signs, the Greeks for wisdom, they say they found neither in the crucified Christ, just foolishness. And this seems to be the opposite of the experience today. People seem able to accept the events of Good Friday but it is the resurrection that has become a stumbling block. When was the last time you saw a lamb and flag dangling from someone's ear lobe, or emblazoned over their back? Perhaps it says something about the nature of our society; but I wonder, if more than anything, it says something about the nature of the church.

The church has struggled in its proclamation of the resurrection, we have not allowed the hope and joy of Easter to spill out into our lives. When there is an emphasis on the death of Christ, on the sacrifice, we can end with a rather dour, miserable, world renouncing faith! The Puritans of old seem to suck the joy of out of faith; they even wanted to ban Christmas, remember! The cross is something we can almost rationalize, because we see the cross played out in injustices, war, division and hatred, but this morning we are to put aside the rational, the 'trying to make sense of everything' and allow some room for emotion and impulse. After all it was sheer emotion and impulse that drove the women to the tomb. It was a rather pointless journey after all; the tomb was sealed and guarded. If they had been rational they would have missed the resurrection. For us the over whelming emotion this morning should be that of

joy. The world it seems is consumed with the search for happiness or pleasure, but what of joy? CS Lewis puts it well in his autobiography. He writes '*of an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and Pleasure.*'

Pure Joy is in explicable, we glimpse from time to time and it elicits a response which calls us beyond ourselves, it has an ethical dimension. Music and song seem to be the vehicles of joy. In church, as in much of life, we sing when we are full of joy: what more joy than that at the resurrection? Think of what we have heard and sung this morning, think of the Alleluias, silent during Lent, the Exsultet 'Rejoice heavenly powers sing choirs of angels,' and the great Easter hymns which we will sing throughout this morning.

We should be rejoicing that we are not just singing *about* the risen Lord, but are singing and celebrating our *encounter* with the Risen Christ, this is where the rubber hits the road, this is the ethical dimension! This is where we the Church needs to ensure that the resurrection becomes as prominent as the cross. This is nothing new, St Augustine wrote at some length about this very issue and so I would to turn to him and see what he has to say. He wrote this '*the new song and the New Testament belong to the same kingdom*' and then he puts the boot in, '*you sing*' he says, '*of course you sing, I can hear you; but make sure that your life sings the same tune as your mouth!*' He puts another way, '*the singer himself (herself) is the praise contained in the song.*' In other words if we want to speak and sing the praise of God, we must ourselves be what we speak!

Alleluia must be said to our neighbour not just in voice, but in life, lifestyle, deed and conscience! Conscience...yes conscience, Augustine firmly puts the other boot in here, he won't let us off the hook, it is not just what we say or sing, not just what we do, he writes '*God has ears for what your heart is saying.*' Just as we have ears for what people are saying. But God hears what we are thinking!

This liturgy is full of lavish over the top praise, it is full of symbolism, it demands of us that we let go, and plunge in. It is not a lecture on intellectual understanding, it also has nothing to do with justifying ourselves, we don't even need to be good singers! We need to jump in the deep end, and get up to our necks in the joy of the resurrection. This morning we encounter the risen Christ, and from here live as Christ in the world. We have said much and sung much, we are in the presence of God who hears what our hearts are saying. We are to make sure that our lives sing the same tune as our mouths.

This wonderful liturgy says it all, it calls us to 'let go and let God' and live our lives in the light of this encounter with the risen Christ.

Christ is Risen - He is Risen indeed!