

The Resurrection: But What about the Eggs?

Sermon for Easter Day, 4 April 2021

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor ACT Australia

The Reverend Canon Professor Scott Cowdell

Isaiah 25: 6-9; Hymn to the Risen Christ; Acts 10: 34-43; Mark 16: 1-8

+In the Name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

There's a tradition that sermons on Easter Day should begin with a joke, because the resurrection invites us to laugh in the face of so many fears that people take way too seriously, not least the fear of death. So here goes. In Woody Allen's film *Annie Hall*, we're told about a man who asked a psychiatrist about his brother, who thought he was a chicken. The psychiatrist said to bring the brother along so he could be cured. The man replied, "but we need the eggs."

Friends, the resurrection of Jesus Christ reminds me of this joke—that something so unlikely might actually be the case, if we look at the bigger picture.

So, let's do that, starting with the earliest and least elaborate of the resurrection stories in all our four gospels, the one from Mark, which we heard this morning.

It's a story of confusion, encounter, promise, then more confusion. There's no appearance from Jesus, only an empty tomb and that inconclusive meeting with a witness, whoever that might be. The promise is that if Jesus' disciples and Peter their leader go to Galilee, if they go out to the wider world, then the risen Jesus will reveal himself among them, just as he'd told them. In other words, the proof of the resurrection pudding will be in the missional eating. Going out in Jesus' name will turn out to involve encounters with Jesus. This resurrection story is so minimal that a second ending was added to Mark's Gospel subsequently, to beef the story up a bit. Maybe this earlier ending wasn't thought to be definite enough, and perhaps even a bit embarrassing.

But for today's world that typically struggles with religious truth claims, the idea that resurrection isn't meant to be obvious or in your face and can only commend itself through

the life of faith might gain some fresh traction. Scientifically-minded people resist the idea that anything can intrude on the closed world of empirical evidence and rational necessity. Humanities-minded people affirm a world of different stories and perspectives without expecting any of them to represent absolute truth—as Don Cupitt once said, every timeless truth is a period piece. But the claim that Jesus is alive from God and that Christians come to know him in the life of faith is truth of a different order, neither purely subjective or relative on the one hand, or else provable by observation or rational necessity on the other hand.

Let me briefly mention two other points from our readings today. Our Hymn to the Risen Christ is about the meaning of Jesus' resurrection and not primarily its naked facticity. Jesus' resurrection is the cause of celebration, feasting, joy, and a new imperative to live beyond the power of sin—to experience a new aliveness that still holds up against today's widespread alternatives, where shame and trauma and crises of identity rob so many of peace and even of sanity. Finding a new lease of life is at the heart of what resurrection belief

means for Christians, and without one we can't typically make sense of the other. Resurrection believing and finding a Resurrection spring in your step are two sides of the one coin. The joy of today's Isaiah passage, from the Old Testament, reveals a hopeful religious imagination on the lookout for such new beginnings. Christians found this new beginning in the Church's shared experience, with a sense that Jesus was alive from God in the Eucharist they celebrated and the lives they lived as a faith community.

This is what we see in our Acts reading today, with Peter's sermon giving us a window into what the earliest Christian preaching entailed. The witnesses to Jesus' ministry and his death on the cross also testified in various ways to their sense that he was alive with them, some very explicitly. But Peter chiefly testifies to new breakthrough insights that were galvanizing the earliest Churches—in this case, to the new influx of non-Jewish people were pressing their claim on the Church, which Peter sees as a new world-transforming reality revealing itself.

And it's worth noting here that this isn't how resurrections present themselves elsewhere in world mythology.

Resurrections in mythology often involve a persecuted figure back from the dead to re-knit a persecuted group, confirming the group's partiality over against a hostile environment. But not this resurrection. Peter declares that God shows no partiality—no partiality—as the Church's boundaries are opened wide to the other, not drawn tight against them.

Friends, in all these ways the resurrection of Jesus Christ presents itself as a new, subtle, inclusive energy in the lives of Christians that's linked to Jesus' presence and that of his body, though in a variety of ways. Peter in Acts declares that many had testified to meeting the risen Jesus, but then don't forget Mark's rather different early account. There we find an empty tomb and a sense that something remarkable is afoot though there's no objective meeting with the risen Jesus, but only the promise that he'd meet his followers on the road.

So, back to my Woody Allen story. While it's odd that someone might think they're a chicken, the eggs do demand

an explanation. Likewise with the resurrection, which from the start was a way of interpreting Jesus' ongoing impact, and the Church's sense of his ongoing presence—that for Christians, Jesus is a living Lord rather than a dead founder. This isn't meant to be nailed down cognitively or to compete with what today's sciences and humanities can teach us. Instead it involves a more integral, a more allusive, a more participatory sort of knowing. Yes, it's weird, but then what about the eggs?

The Lord be with you ...