

Third Sunday of Easter 2021

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. This is among my favourite texts because of its affirmation of what we are now, but at the same time its sense of us being so much more.

You'd be right in thinking that a week has passed and we are still in the upper room with Jesus offering us his peace; not much seems to have happened. But there is much happening here.

So much of what I call 'Pop Metaphysics' are as a result of Plato! When I say 'Pop Metaphysics' I mean the sorts of things that you hear at funerals. Plato advocates a belief in the immortality of the soul, and several his dialogues end with long speeches imagining the afterlife. Several dialogues also discuss ethics; Plato views "The Good" as the supreme ethic or 'Form,' somehow existing even "beyond being".

I think we can say that Plato was of a view that there is this life and we navigate this life through this body and when it expires our soul continues on, on another plane. On this plane is the 'Good' which is beyond being, but which we strive for in our ethics. I am of course not doing justice to Plato, but I am sure that you can see where I am going and where so much of our thinking and so much religious thought finds its origin and yes we can glimpse this thinking in our scriptures. But is this the message of the resurrection? Is this the message of Christian faith which we confess in the creeds: I believe in the resurrection of the body?

As an aside, over the past few years there has been a resurgence in interest in Borley Rectory in Essex, England, reputedly 'the most haunted house in England.' Two movies have been released, one quite recently called 'The Banishing.' Now I haven't seen these movies. But I don't really need to because in 1980 along with a group of other recalcitrants I spent the night in the grounds of the deserted Borley Rectory. Our endeavours to record some sort of paranormal activity were unsuccessful. But we did succeed in scaring the living daylights out of each other and no doubt I did, as my mother told me I would, catch my death of cold! As dawn broke and the temperature fell below freezing, my colleagues retreated to their car. I was on a motorbike!

*Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'* They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. It is true we do seem to be stuck in the upper room hearing a similar story to last week. But today we are listening to Luke's gospel and Luke is speaking to a largely Greek audience, they are perhaps not so different to us. Luke wants to show them what the resurrection means. Jesus is no disembodied soul wandering aimlessly in the netherworld seeking revenge on those who had abandoned him. Jesus offers his peace and then invites his disciples to touch him and importantly to see his wounds.

Not only is Luke countering Plato's idea of body and soul he is reacting against platonic idealism, because the resurrection is about realism. It is the

crucified Christ that has come among them. The resurrection is *the* affirmation of life, *despite* death. It is not about death or the afterlife, it is about this life renewed, transfigured. It is about reconciliation, about completeness. It is the revelation of God in Christ, it is about the identity of Christ and therefore our identity.

I'd like to pick up on something that I spoke about briefly at the Eucharist on Thursday Michael Ramsey the 100<sup>th</sup> ABP Canterbury once famously said 'God is Christlike, and in him is no unChristlikeness at all.' This is revealed to us ultimately in the resurrection, we glimpse this God in the life of Jesus, but it is in the resurrected Christ that we see God. In the resurrected Christ there is this great affirmation of life. Life is not downplayed as being transient and miserable, it is not brutish and short as one cheerful writer put it, life is affirmed. We see the risen Lord, eating with his disciples. He re-commissions them to go into the world, fed my sheep, fed my lambs he says to Peter. Peace I leave you he says as I have been sent me so I send you. He also encourages them to see the marks of crucifixion. This is no perfect divine creature this is the crucified God who sends the disciples into the world, his wounds being part of their own identity, that they might better heal the wounds of others. As Peter reminds his listeners healing has come not through his own own power or piety.

Resurrection is about identity and therefore resurrection is a political, environmental, societal event. It is the event which shapes everything. It is God's commitment to a reconciled world. This is why the first-century Christians perceived questions of social identity and social boundaries as *theological* questions, questions about the identity of God. This is why we need to see the modern ecological movement as a theological question, about the identity of God. This is why we need to see the question of human identity and sexuality as a theological question, about the identity of God. This is why we need to see all human interaction as a theological question, about the identity of God. All this because of the person of Jesus the Christ through whom God and humanity are reconciled, a reconciliation revealed in the resurrection.

What we mustn't do is read the gospels as if Jesus' conceals his identity and then it's revealed at the resurrection. Too often I think Christians think about the resurrection in terms of a story told by Soren Kierkegaard about a prince riding through his field. The prince sees a peasant girl gathering the crops. She is beautiful and the prince falls instantly in love with her. However, he is a noble prince and does not want to overwhelm her with his power and riches, so he dresses in peasant clothes and goes to work side by side with her. Kierkegaard uses this story to suggest that we think the resurrection must be like a prince who has been hiding the purple under his rough clothes. The resurrection reveals the purple. However, Kierkegaard notes the only problem with this way of thinking about the resurrection is that Jesus has no purple under his flesh. Jesus is peasant clothes, flesh, all the way down. He is not playing at being a human. He is truly human; he is what we shall be. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. At the resurrection Christ reveals true humanity, our true identity and tells us to go out and live it! Amen.