

Easter Day - Rev'd John Goldsworthy - 4th April 2010

When a much awaited new baby is born there is great celebration of this new life – this new, unique human being. Most of you have experienced such celebrations whether as parents, grand parents, uncles, aunts, or older siblings. There are high hopes that the new baby will grow to have successful, healthy and long life. A long life, yes, but no-one expects an endless, earthly life for the new arrival.

Today, by contrast, we rejoice and celebrate life that is endless. We celebrate life of such a quality that it could not end; a life force so powerful that death could not hold it. We celebrate the victorious resurrection of the Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Son of God. This Day, this worship that we share together, stands in sharp contrast to the solemnity of our Good Friday services in a bare, church as we considered the cruel death of Jesus which he suffered on our behalf. If you were otherwise occupied on Good Friday, you may not feel the force of today's celebration so much.

Modern, secular society sanitizes death. We are asked to believe that death is just a normal stage of life. Newspapers don't print death notices anymore, they print Tributes and Celebrations, people don't die, they pass away, police never discover a dead man, only a male person deceased. The Springvale Crematorium and Cemetery was for years named The Necropolis, a Greek word meaning City of the Dead, but now it's the Springvale Botanical Cemetery.

The New Testament view is at odds with all this secular sanitizing of death and the atheistic belief that death is extinction with no after life. From the Biblical perspective, death is actually a disintegrating disaster. Essentially death is not extinction but separation. Death separates body and soul. Death separates loved ones from each other. Spiritual death separates people from God. But separation and disintegration are diametrically opposed to the nature of our Trinitarian God. The persons of the Trinity are eternally bonded in life giving love.

So, when God created humankind in his image, he created us to be permanently bonded to him and to our fellow human beings in love, because God is love. Human rebellion messed that up and death became the inescapable destiny of every living thing. From the beginning of human moral responsibility and accountability, death has not been just an **event** that comes to every living thing; death in the NT understanding is a dominating, ruling power from which only the intervention of the power of God could release us. Today we celebrate the proof that God's intervention through Jesus was totally effective.

Richard Dawkins and his skeptics portray faith as "blind faith". He says that it is the sacrifice of all our intellectual capacities. Indeed we are a people of faith, a Bible based faith, but is it we who have a problem with blindness? It has been said that there is more documentary evidence for the life of Jesus than for the life of Julius Caesar.

So let's look a little into what it means for us today as we celebrate the rising of Jesus from the dead.

First and foremost, the resurrection of Jesus demonstrates the total sufficiency of His atoning sacrifice in his suffering and death. By perfectly keeping God's law, Jesus, being sinless himself, could offer the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world. Had his sacrifice not been all sufficient, God could not have raised him to be the Saviour of the world. As it is, we can have full confidence that he will carry us through into eternity with him.

Secondly, in his various post resurrection appearances, Jesus revealed that he had risen bodily. He was not some sort of ethereal spirit or ghost. He was not a disembodied soul. He could be touched. He invited doubting Thomas to feel his crucifixion wounds. He ate and drank with the disciples. Yet, at the same time he was changed. He was not always easily recognizable at first. His raised body transcended the limitations of his normal pre-resurrection state. Twice he came and stood among the disciples in the upper room even though the doors were locked and barred.

This physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus is a sign that God's redeeming activity includes the physical, material universe. As Peter reminds us, "According to [God's] promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." Perfected physical bodies need a perfected physical and moral environment in which to function.

Then, the resurrected body of Jesus is a pointer to our heavenly existence. We too will be raised bodily. We retain our identity, though in perfected form. All physical, psychological and moral imperfections will be removed. Sin, pain, disability and death will be no more.

The resurrected body of Jesus was in a real sense out of place here on earth. Jesus now belonged on the other side of the grave. His first words to Mary Magdalene when she finally recognized him outside the empty tomb were, "Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and to your God.'" Jesus was saying clearly, "I am alive from the dead but you cannot keep me here. The salvation process is not complete until I carry my perfected humanness into the presence of your heavenly Father."

When, in the creed, we say, "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father", we are proclaiming that we human beings have a representative in the place of highest honour beside the Heavenly Father. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, is now where he belongs and we, in prospect, belong there with him. As Paul put it, "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body

by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." Moreover, the risen, ascended Christ is active on our behalf. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us, "[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them."

In his resurrection, Jesus burst the chains of death on our behalf.

In his ascension, he carried our humanity to where it belongs, freed by divine grace from all the effects of sin and death.

He now cares for us, not as pleading for God to be kind to us, but the one whose very presence guarantees God's loving intentions for us.

And he promises to return to gather his people from the four corners of the universe and to establish the new order. Let Paul have the last word: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has the human mind imagined the good things that God has prepared for those who love him."

None of this would be possible if Jesus had not risen from the grave.

Christ has died, **Christ is risen**, Christ will come again!!

John Goldsworthy