

Sunday, March 27th, 2016, Sunday of Resurrection

Readings: Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, Luke 24:1-1

Resurrection!

Uprising, rebellion, resurrection...they all come from the same root, they all refer to an overturning of what is for something else, old situations for new ones, death for life. We have already heard of two stories, resurrection-al stories, stories of struggle, stories that ultimately celebrate life over death: first that of Anh Do and his experience as an asylum seeker where resurrection *slowly* dawns as he becomes part of a new community that only gradually embraces him (*The Little Refugee*., Anh and Suzanne Do/illustrated Bruce Whatley/ Allen &Unwin, Sydney, 2011); and then the other, that of the Andes flight disaster of October 13th, 1972 (my Chilean Gilda remembers it well as a 12 year old), when a Fairchild prop jet, leased from the Uruguayan Airforce to carry a rugby team, the “Old Christians” to Chile, crashes (*Alive, Kennedy Marshall Company, 1993, based on the book, “Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors” ,Piers Paul Reid, JB Lippincott and Company, 1974*). Sixteen of the forty five remain alive, two of whom, Roberto Canessa and Nando Parrado, after months of awaiting a rescue that never comes, finally walk out of the Andes, to seek help in the Chilean city of Curicó. The journey from death to life nearly kill s them, but finally they cry out to a farmer over a raging river – one Sergio Catalán –who rides westward to bring help, unsure as to who they are or even their predicament. The events of the plane crash had been forgotten, the press cycle had moved on, no-one dreamt that Roberto and Nando or anyone else could have survived. On 23rd December, the fourteen were finally rescued: resurrection *suddenly* dawns. In both stories, life was seized from the jaws of death: for Anh Do, gradually, over years; for the Uruguayans after some months, as the Chilean rescue helicopters appear over the ridge. But there is something more to these stories than just the events as dramatic and stirring as they are. First there is the fact of historical, material reality: these are stories about reality about resurrection-al reality. Second there is the fact of memory, the importance of remembering resurrection and what the act of remembering can do. What I want to do this morning is to consider these two points: *reality as the place of resurrection*, and *remembering resurrection*, and I want to do it through the lens of the readings.

Readings

First, reality as the place of resurrection

Luke’s gospel is a very grounded, earthy gospel. Luke is concerned about the reality changing capacity of the Kingdom of God given expression through Jesus. Luke is concerned about resurrection and its dynamic power to transform not just people’s lives in the here and now but whole social and political situations. So, in Luke we find something unique: whereas in Mark, Matthew and John the angels present at the tomb attempt to comfort those who arrive, in Luke, the women are challenged, scolded with the words: “*Why do you seek the living among the dead*”? In other words cemeteries are no place for the living! Look, really look round you! Think, really think! The empty tomb screams out about protest, rebellion against death and all those forces that generate it. In Luke’s mind, these death-dealing forces include the state as it abuses its own people, religion when it loses its way and oppresses, cultures when they become exclusive and excluding, economies when they enslave people under the weight of debt. For Luke *reality* is the place of resurrection, the place where the kingdom of God breaks in and potentially transforms things.

But why does Luke have to insist upon the point? Why does Luke have to labour the issue that resurrection is about reality, the whole of reality, rather than something else?

The answer is pretty clear and it is this: that religious people have a way of avoiding reality, projecting themselves into heaven and things celestial at the expense of what I call “the real”. This

happens all the time among pious well-meaning Christians: but no, it is not a recent phenomenon. As long ago as the advent of the early Christian communities there was the tendency for believers to see themselves as citizens of heaven with little investment in concrete earthy realities. For example, the Corinthian community held to a very reductionist view of what mattered. They were only interested in “things of the spirit”, spiritual things, not bodily things, heavenly things, things of the soul; reality had no allure for them at all. In the face of this *avoidance* Paul interrogates them through pointing out that it was the whole of Jesus including his physical body that was resurrected. In other words, for Paul, all of reality, the whole of reality *is the place for resurrection*: people, community, society, economies, faiths, cultures: *nothing* can be excluded.

But the Christian community of Corinth was not the only offender. Even the apostle Peter had a similar reductionist, avoidance problem: not the super-spiritualized one of the Corinthians, but one that reduced reality to things Jewish: in one breath Peter *excludes* the rest of the world, the non-Jews from reality. Our reading from Acts where he, Peter, finally announces that “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness” is only a new insight, in the light of his experience of the non-Jew, the centurion Cornelius experiencing the Spirit of God.

For the Corinthians, the power of resurrection is limited to the spiritist, non-material plane, while for Peter, it is limited to ethno-creedal specific Jew. Both have lessons to learn: resurrection includes the whole of reality, not just snippets, particular dimensions that we may find convenient. *Reality is everything and resurrection potentially renews everything: even those aspects of life that we may hold onto because of our perceived self-interest.*

Second, Remembering Resurrection

Both Anh Do and the Uruguayan survivors *remember their resurrection*, hence *his* book, hence *their* book and the movie. Remembering resurrection-al experiences where life overpowers death has a way of shaping the very way we live: it certainly shaped theirs - Anh Do has spent much of his life working for causes related to the struggle against children’s cancer. Roberto Canessa has spent much of his life working for social justice among Uruguay’s poor, speaking more than once about how the power of his own resurrection from death led to an awakening to the living deaths that people live in poverty and oppression. For his part, Luke refers to the apparent angels engaging with the women at the tomb, calling upon *them to remember the events*. Like Anh Do and Canessa, for the women, the invitation to remember means not just to recall the events of Jesus’ resurrection, but to actually to *re-present them, to make resurrection present in the here and now.*

Resurrection is to be embraced, to be appropriated, to be applied, to be made our own, in contexts, situations where we see suffering and death imposed upon others. In the fourth century, the bishop Irenaeus of Lyon coined a phrase which captures, which grasps the meaning of resurrection-al Easter: *gloria Dei vivens homo...the glory of God is a living human being.*