



Second Sunday in Easter Sunday, April 19th, 2020

Blind Belief?



Through the Season of Easter, we take the opportunity to deepen our thinking about what resurrection means: the resurrection of Jesus and of course, our own. The problem is that this is easier said than done, because of the difficulty of language and how we use it. It is as if words are not enough, that words cannot fully express our sense about ourselves and where we are headed. Doing the best, I can, the Biblical witness to the resurrection of Jesus points to what we sense or intuit about ourselves, about the definitive state of the human person: the idea of being redeemed. It is through the account of the resurrection of Jesus that we look to our own resurrection, and all that this implies, suggests. But even in saying this – and as I read what I have just written – I still ask myself if I can be clearer. Let me put it this way!

First that the very instinct of resurrection which lies within us, is not foreign to us: the fact that we can even imagine the idea of resurrection beyond our historical-earthly lives, is because in small ways we experience approximations to resurrection in our current lives. Those experiences of life and joy, of life and hope, of life and fulfillment, of life and meaning, are nothing less than near-nesses, likenesses, resemblances to resurrection. They give us a taste of what we strain toward, what we long to experience.

Second, that to live resurrectionally, is altogether more satisfactory than the alternative. The Catholic theologian Karl Rahner wrote in his little article on “Jesus’ Resurrection”, in a rather round-about but beautiful way,

“If we are sceptics, have we any positive meaningfulness to offer for our lives and the lives of others? And if in reply to this we sought to say, ‘Oh yes, all that about the resurrection of Jesus would certainly be very beautiful, but it is too beautiful to be true’, then the reply to this would be to ask, ‘Why should not a person prefer the darkness of his existence to consist in faith in an absolute light, rather than to commit himself to this darkness as one who has been banished from the light?’”

OUR GATHERING

We meditate: Adoramus te O Christe (Taizé)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm6Zr3EqlhE>

Greeting

In the name of the Father,
In the name of the Son,
In the name of the Holy Spirit

Christ is risen!

Sing a new song!
Sing praise to our still-laughing Easter God;
who has rolled away the limitations of yesterday.

Immerse your anxiety and despair in the fountain of resurrection;
for God takes ordinary things;
and makes them extraordinary.

We turn our eyes to the Paschal Candle

We light the candle knowing that our faith in Jesus
is sometimes strong,
sometimes elusive,
sometimes seething with doubt.

By doubting we come to inquiry,
by inquiry we come to truth.
Questions from the scaffolding, from which my own faith is built.

Easter is the season when we thoughtfully celebrate
Christ breaking the bounds of death and hell
Christ breaking the limitations of yesterday

Hymn: Crown him with many Crowns (TiS 228, Diademata, George Job Elvey)

A Prayer Confessing our Struggle in Belief in Resurrection

Our Gospel reading for the day centres upon the story of the disciple Thomas. Usually the story is taken to infer that Thomas doubts the historical truth of Jesus' resurrection. There is however something in addition to this: namely, Thomas' scepticism because he sees no evidence of a resurrected world around him. Indeed, he and his companions are hold-up in a room in fear. Thomas is clear that for Jesus' resurrection to be believable, there must be tangible signs of a new world, not just the continuation of the old one: new people with new ways of thinking and acting, new cultures that move beyond self-defensiveness, new faith that does more than reinforce a sense of insider/outsider, and new society, where people may all breathe together.

'Sometimes We Wonder'.

The creation is alive with the life and glory of God
.....yet sometimes we wonder

***After the music has died away and
we are faced with the challenges of a new day
...sometimes we wonder...***

Wonder whether we have the heart to keep going.
The way ahead seems unclear
and so much is changing around and within us...

***After the music has died away and
we are faced with the challenges of a new day
...sometimes we wonder...***

Wonder whether we have the imagination to keep hoping,
when the pain and struggles of our hurting world catch at our
throats and draw us into despair...

***After the music has died away and
we are faced with the challenges of a new day
...sometimes we wonder...***

Then into our weariness new life is breathed.
Into our helplessness fresh dreams are poured.

But we still wonder...

Amen

The Peace

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Sunday Morning Group (SMG)

The kids leave us for work and fun.

BREAKING OPEN THE WORD

A Way into the Readings concerning Belief

Although I'm a very emotional man, I just can't have blind faith; I have to find out for myself.

David Suchet – actor of Inspector Poirot fame

The meme for blind faith secures its own perpetuation by the simple unconscious expedient of discouraging rational inquiry.

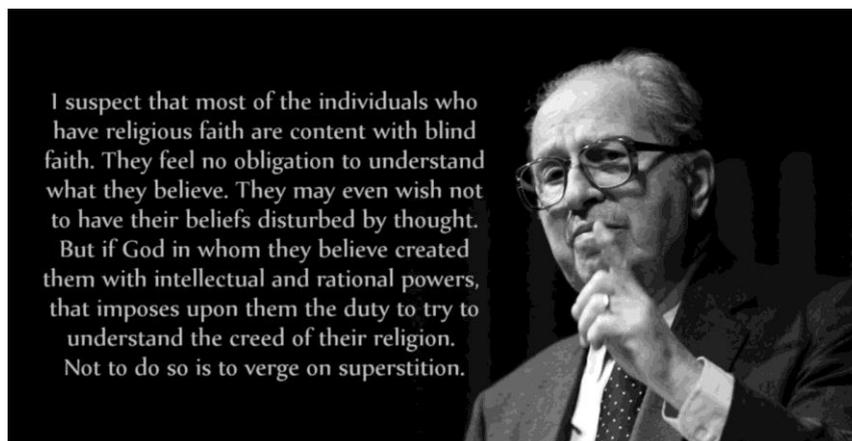
Richard Dawkins – atheist

Dawkins considers that all faith is blind faith, and that Christian and Muslim children are brought up to believe unquestioningly. Not even the dim-witted clerics who knocked me about at grammar school thought that.

Terry Eagleton – philosopher and Christian

To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle."

George Orwell – British novelist



Mortimer Adler – American theologian and philosopher

Acts 2:14a, 22-32 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

This passage is an excerpt from Peter's speech at the day of Pentecost, for which the Lectionary provides the introduction in 2:14a. Luke, the name traditionally given to the author of the gospel and Acts, is recreating early Christian history. Faithful to the best historical methods of the day, he has composed a speech which he wants to persuade his hearers and readers is most likely to be the kind of thing that Peter might have said. Luke's historical reconstructions are therefore much more than history. They are narrative theology, to which we need to attune our ears. So when we come to Peter's speech, we are hearing Luke the theologian at work and it puts emphasis on Jesus' ministry. Luke's theology is interesting in that it is emphasized. This may seem a strange comment, however among many Protestants, Jesus' earthly life, his ministry, what he does is often only seen as a precursor to the really important thing: the cross and our salvation through it. In underscoring, Jesus' life, Luke's focus however, is not on Jesus' "doing good" (Acts 10:38), but rather his miracles: depicting them as signs of divine approval. The claim that miracles indicate divine approval was a standard propaganda ploy of the Roman establishment and such ploys led to bidding wars between godheads. They also led to a rather superficial faith, which is always the danger.

14-21 Then Peter, with the eleven standing by him, raised his voice and addressed them:

22-28 "Men of Israel, I beg you to listen to my words. Jesus of Nazareth was a man proved to you by God himself through the works of power, the miracles and the signs which God showed through him here amongst you—as you very well know. This man, who was put into your power by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed up and murdered, and you used for your purpose men without the Law! But God would not allow the bitter pains of death to touch him. He raised him to life again—and indeed there was nothing by which death could hold such a man. When David speaks about him he says, 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh will also rest in hope, because you will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of joy in your presence.'

29-35 "Men and brother-Jews, I can surely speak freely to you about the patriarch David. There is no doubt that he died and was buried, and his grave is here among us to this day. But while he was alive he was a prophet. He knew that God had given him a most solemn promise that he would place one of his descendants upon his throne. He

foresaw the resurrection of Christ, and it is this of which he is speaking. Christ was not deserted in death and his body was never destroyed. 'Christ is the man Jesus, whom God raised up—a fact of which all of us are eye-witnesses!'

The word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Psalm 16

Psalm 16 finds its place in the readings for the Easter period because of v. 10: 'For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.' This could be understood to refer to resurrection. This was the understanding of the writer of Acts 2:24-32; 13:32-39 as they read the latter part of Psalm 16 in relation to God raising Jesus from the dead. The first of these readings is part of the Acts reading set for today. But the psalm is simply not a prediction or foreshadowing of the resurrection of Jesus. It is unlikely that in Old Testament times Ps 16:10 was understood in terms of resurrection the way we understand Jesus' resurrection. It was more likely a prayer by an individual for God to preserve their life in the face of some grave difficulty or threat. Alternatively, it may have been a reflection on the way the Lord had preserved Israel through the period of exile

¹Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

²I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."

³As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.

⁴Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.

⁵The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

⁶The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.

⁷I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

⁸I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.

¹⁰For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.

¹¹You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

John 20:19-31 (Good News Translation)

This is the famous story of “doubting Thomas”. Reading early church history, the Church Fathers had little tolerance for Thomas: he was seen as the incorrigible doubter. In John’s Gospel, Thomas is seen with more nuance. He is a doubter, he is a dubious figure, but he also finally confesses Jesus as Lord and God. In John’s Gospel, then, Thomas is seen as ambiguous: he gets it right but he is not exemplary. In John’s Gospel, there is an investment in higher faith that believes without proof (20:29). Thomas is one who requires proof. In the medieval and modern worlds, proof for the existence of God is what has preoccupied the world of theology. In these changed circumstances, Thomas receives gentler treatment, Thomas is read more sympathetically.

¹⁹ It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁰ After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” ²² Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting and believe!”

²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!”

³⁰ In his disciples’ presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. ³¹ But these have been written

in order that you may believe^[a] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Yours be the glory (TiS 380, Maccabeus, Adapted George Frederick Handel)

Movie Clip: “Les choristes” (The Choir Boys) 2004

Clément Mathieu, a failed musician, arrives at Fond de l'Étang ("Bottom of the Pond"), a French boarding school for troubled boys, to work as a supervisor and teacher.

Mathieu discovers the boys being ruthlessly punished by the headmaster Rachin and attempts to use humour and kindness to win them over. On discovering the boys singing rude songs about him, Mathieu forms a plan: he will teach them to sing and form a choir as a form of discipline. He groups the boys according to their voice types, but one student, Pierre Morhange, refuses to sing. Mathieu catches Morhange singing to himself, discovers he has a wonderful singing voice and awards him solo parts on the condition that he behaves.

The story is, when experienced as a whole, about the resurrection of these boys, as they are befriended and redeemed: a sheer act of grace.

Some thoughts...

Let's Give: Our Offerings

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

The one who prays after a series of petitions says, “Raise us Lord” and the people respond, “Make us a risen people”. Today, write your own prayers for the world, as we continue to confront many challenges.

Closing Hymn: Love Divine (TIS 217, Blaenwern 590, William Penfro Rowlands)

Blessing and Sending Out

Christ is risen!

We see reality through resurrection

We seek to live lovingly, truthfully, hospitably.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

We meditate: Adoramus te O Christe (Taizé)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm6Zr3EqlhE>