

2012 Easter 3

Resurrection as homecoming

Christ is risen, so it's all OK, hunky dory and we can all get on with being nice to each other as Christians are.

No, no, no, Christ having risen is rather a challenge.

- Imagine how Judas must have felt when, having agreed to give information to the Romans, he came face to face with what he'd done to his friend by kissing him.
- Imagine how ashamed Peter must have been to have to look into the face of the man he thought was dead and who he'd denied three times.
- Imagine how ashamed the disciples must have been to have to look into the face of the master that they'd deserted.
- Imagine how ashamed Thomas must have been to have to eat humble pie the week after he'd been so definite.
- Imagine the shame.

Shame is a great motivator. It gives away our guilt by making us protest too much. It makes us think of walking away from awkward situations when we would be better to face the shame. It makes us fill our lives with activity to distract us from facing the shame. Read Charles Dickens Great Expectations and see how shame motivated Pip. Read the biography of Dickens to see how shame motivated all his frenetic activity as social reformer. It's interesting that Dickens regarded himself as 'very small and not-over-particularly-taken-care-of boy'. Think of how many of Dickens' books are about small and not-over-particularly-taken-care-of boys: Great Expectations, David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby ...

The Easter experience – new life – means that we **all** must confront uncomfortable truths about ourselves, our pasts, our behaviour—the people we have hurt intentionally or unintentionally, the things we have done that we wish we hadn't, and the things we have not done that we wish we had. The Risen Christ forces all our baggage, our guilt and shame, to the surface. The Resurrection means having to confront who we actually are.

When we meet someone else, we put on a façade: bumptious, or aggressive, or submissive or charming, or whatever. When we confront Christ, he sees us as we really are, and when we realize that, we are overawed, even ashamed. It is too much to bear. When we glimpse ourselves as the Lord sees us—or even as others see us—we can get an awful shock. This is not something that is reserved for the after-life, it is something that can hit us here and now. It is part of conscience, though conscience is not a big enough word for it.

We look in the mirror and see not the urbane, charming, well manicured and scrubbed person we present to the world, but instead the ordinary fallible human being. And it is so much easier to love the ordinary fallible human being than the scrubbed up image, because in the ordinary fallible human being we are the real thing rather than the pretentious deception. As your Rector, I would rather deal with the ordinary fallible human being who shouts at me, or loses his temper with me, than with the charmer who says one thing to my face and another behind my back.

Jesus stands before these frightened disciples who had all wronged him in some way. He stands before us, the ordinary fallible human beings, and says 'peace to you.' Shalom. Salaam. Salvation. Having been brought up sharp to the reality of shame, the disciples Peter and Thomas, and you and I, are accepted. We are forgiven. The great thing is that the reality of Peter's denials, and Thomas's doubt are not in the least condemned by Jesus. Peter **is** the rock on whom the church is built. Thomas's need for evidence **was** affirmed by Jesus.

And that is like a homecoming. Like the younger son in the Prodigal Son parable returning when he realized what an idiot he'd been. The door is never shut. This door of this church is never shut. The door of the Rectory is never shut. The door of the Rector's heart is never shut.

In truth, we have God inside us all. That sanctuary of the soul that is hidden within, that we need to let fill us from the inside out. We sometimes choose to keep it locked up and pretend it is not there. That is when we are driven by pride and self-obsessedness. When we open that door, the divine light floods out. It might make us shed tears of joy that melt the heart of ice (O my Saviour lifted).

This is forgiveness. We do not have forgiveness because we acknowledge our sins. We have forgiveness therefore we acknowledge our sins, our human frailty.

The younger son saw himself as the Lord saw him. He chose to take the first step. He could have chosen not to. He came home, forgiven. This is resurrection. We can choose to exclude ourselves, or we can choose to be a part of God's kingdom here and now. The choice is ours as to whether or not we stay in the cold and become bitter and twisted, or we come home acknowledging our imperfections, and enjoy the divine presence and the divine warmth of divine light and love.

Resurrection or wilderness is the choice facing each one of us. A pretty easy decision, you would think, but one demanding openness, honesty and courage.