

## Easter Sunday – Year A

Today's readings naturally concentrate on the resurrection of Christ from the dead. But they reflect quite specifically on the 'so what' of that reality. Peter, in his uniquely Jewish way, explains how Jesus is the fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy and is a key figure in the divine plan. The Christians in the city of Colossae, in the heart of present day Türkiye, are reminded that their faith in Christ had bought them a new life, and in the Johannine gospel we see the closest followers of Jesus coming to grips with the meaning of an empty tomb.

**Acts 10:34, 37-43** Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, describes two servants and a soldier from the staff of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius, on their way to Joppa (Jaffa) to ask Peter if he would accompany them back to Cornelius' house in Caesarea. Luke says Peter was urged by the Spirit to go back with these men, so, the following day they all headed back to Caesarea.

Peter had been mulling over a vision he had of a collection of different animals, reptiles and birds and a voice told him to slaughter one of the creatures and cook it for food. Peter objected that some of the creatures were unclean according to *kashrut*, Jewish food law, but he was told that nothing created by God was unclean. This led Peter to realise that no distinction of race or culture in human beings made any difference with the Creator. All humans are equal in God's sight.

Cornelius explained his own coming to faith in Jesus and asked Peter to say more about his Lord. So, today's reading is a short resumé from Peter of the mission of Jesus and his eventual arrest, crucifixion and amazing resurrection. Peter then bears witness to all these events and speaks of the commission he and the other disciples have of spreading the message of Jesus to the wider world.

### **It is our calling also to bear witness to the values of Christ in the way we live**

Peter is explaining that the life and resurrection of Jesus had completely changed their lives, and their gut was telling them that the Spirit was behind them in their work of spreading the good news of Jesus and the reign of God. What is then obvious in Luke's Acts of the Apostles and in the letters of the New Testament is that the spirituality and example of the Apostles and other missionaries become infectious.

People are impressed by the commitment and lifestyle of these dedicated women and men and are drawn to become Christ followers. It is our calling also to bear witness to the values of Christ in the way we live, speak and cultivate sound relationships with our fellow companions on the journey.

**Psalm 118** This is a post-exilic psalm, quite probably written after the building of the second temple in Jerusalem. This is the temple that Jesus knew, that lasted over four centuries until the Romans destroyed it in 70 C.E. The song expresses the Jewish longing for a future messiah, which Christians now see in the person of Christ. The one who was rejected and crucified has become the foundation of a new era of faith.

**Colossians 3:1-4** In this extract the Colossian community is being urged to live as if they are already with Christ in heaven. The writer is using metaphorical language when he says, 'you have died'. He is simply using the language of 'dying with Christ' to a lifestyle and set of values that are not in keeping with the spirituality of Christ. Our commitment to Christ involves a focus on heavenly or spiritual things. With our thoughts on spiritual things and spiritual goals we can grow to wholeness as we cultivate life-giving relationships with God, with others, with self, and with our natural environment.

Paul had this in mind when he encouraged the Philippian community to reflect and focus their thoughts on wholesome things. In the spirit of '*what you think, you become*' he wrote,

'Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.' (*The Message* version)

**John 20:1-9** John begins his account of the resurrection with the arrival of Mary Magdalene at the tomb. She first appears in John in the previous chapter where she is mentioned as standing near the cross with the mother of Jesus and Mary, wife of Cleopas. Her story continues later at verse 11. It is still dark before the approaching dawn when she comes to the tomb. She has been with her Lord in his last moments and has now come to mourn her loss. She finds the tomb empty and concludes that

the sanctity of the tomb has been violated and the body of Jesus has been stolen. This can only add to her despair.

John interrupts his account of Mary to bring in the two disciples, Peter and the disciple Jesus loved. A tradition going back to Irenaeus (c.180 A.D.) has identified the ‘disciple Jesus loved’ as John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, and author of the Fourth Gospel, but most modern scholars do not hold this opinion. The gospel itself makes no such identification. In fact, most would consider it unlikely that any writer would give himself the title of the ‘disciple Jesus loved’, thereby excluding all the other disciples.

Peter must still be haunted by his denial of Jesus, and he has not had a chance to face his Lord with an apology. Arriving at the tomb he barges in and sees the burial cloths. This could remind us of the burial cloths that had to be removed from the risen Lazarus, who, by the way, is the only man in this gospel described as loved by Jesus. Lazarus was restored to his physical self, whereas Jesus is transformed to a new kind of reality. Paul writes of this transformation in his first letter to the Corinthians (15:51-54).

The Beloved Disciple has seen the burial cloths lying on the ground in the tomb and stops to think. He goes into the tomb after Peter, takes in the scene and believes. Earlier on in the Fourth Gospel we saw the Beloved Disciple arrive at points of understanding. He is clearly the author’s symbol of reflection and comprehension. He certainly contrasts with Peter who is a symbol of action before thought.

### **Experiencing the risen Lord is a spiritual, mystical realisation of connection**

A further contrast surfaces when the other disciples relay their experience to Thomas that they had seen the Lord. But this was not enough for Thomas. He needed physical proof, and yet that experience was not his to have. Seeing was proof enough. And here again, seeing is a metaphor for understanding. Experiencing the risen Lord is a spiritual, mystical realisation of connection, and Thomas opened himself to that reality.

This time of resurrection is a season of new life. What is there in my life that needs a new kick start? Does any of my relationships need repairing with a friendly phone call or text? What am I taking for granted in my day-to-day activities? Surely there is something that needs a shot in the arm with a fresh approach or a re-evaluation. Jesus himself said, ‘I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance’ (John 10:10). He did not come to bring religion but rather a unique way of human relating – relating to God, others, self (easily overlooked!) and our environment. Maybe I need to re-evaluate my relationship with myself as a way of giving life to all my other relationships.



Seek to be whole, not perfect.

Oprah Winfrey



Maurice went to his friend’s birthday celebration and had more than a few drinks. When he returned home, his wife confronted him in the hallway.

‘How much have you had to drink?’ she asked angrily.

‘Not that much,’ Maurice said, leaning against the wall.

‘This is the third time this week you’ve had too much to drink!’ She shouted. ‘It’s either me or the drink. Which one is it?’

Maurice paused and thought for a moment before triumphantly declaring, ‘It’s definitely you. I can tell by the voice.’

*Laurie Woods*