

Sermon Easter Day 2019

It seems to be part our instinctual human nature that when we encounter a BANG! we sit up! We turn. We crane the neck seeking to see where it came from. A car crash, and we cannot help but look toward the horror. A loud noise and we turn toward it. Perhaps a response of fear. Perhaps curiosity. And perhaps to see if these interruptions to our lives demand of us a response. In the history of the world there has been no more dramatic, no more cataclysmic, no event of more earth-shattering significance than what celebrate today: the Resurrection of the Lord Christ from the dead. The dramatic, unprecedented, experience of the resurrection *shook* the first friends and followers of Jesus. And like our instinct to turn and orient ourselves toward the explosion, the crash, the violent interruption, so too when the truth of the resurrection dawned it became clear lives would be changed, that old certainties would be abandoned, that God had brought about a New Thing in raising Jesus from the dead.

And from the empty tomb would spread a ripple, a reverberation, that *has not* diminished these twenty centuries, but only ever continued and grown. Those ripples and reverberations have gone out touching countless millions of lives in very culture and people and language. The ripples and reverberations spreading out from the tomb continuing to disrupt lives, pulling people up, tripping them over, overwhelming them, and compelling them to turn, to turn to This Thing that has happened, compelling them to turn and face the Lord who has burst free from the chains of death. And this one moment becoming the very heart of the Christian proclamation. Not an idea, or philosophy or just a way of life. No. But a *person* who could be known and experienced and encountered. Jesus, risen, becoming the pivot, the turning point around which the history of the world now spins. Jesus, risen, casting out ripples and reverberations across time and place from that time until now.

What we know as ‘good news’ was for the early church exactly the one thing we celebrate today: the resurrection of Jesus. The message that flashed across the ancient world, set hearts on fire, changed lives and turned the world upside down was not ‘love your neighbour’. It was not ‘let’s try and make the world a better place.’ Every sane person already knew that. That was not news. The good news at the very heart of the church’s proclamation was that the man who claimed to be the Son of God and the saviour of the world had risen from the dead.

But the greatest importance of the resurrection is not in the past – Christ *rose* – but in the present – Christ is *risen*! Easter is *now*! And this means Easter has consequences. The long history of the church has recognised this essential truth: the resurrection changes *the direction of lives*. The most dramatic, earth shattering event that has ever occurred in the history of the world means we must turn and walk toward it. Indeed, in the gospel we have heard proclaimed for us this morning, Peter and the other disciple *run* to the tomb. Their witness: run to the Lord, turn to the Lord!

In many ways it is the response of the apostles to the events of Easter that give us one of surest evidences of the truth of Easter. Here was this rag-tag group of unremarkable fellows, who doubted and abandoned their friend and master, who failed to apprehend the content of Jesus' preaching, who by any measure *would not* be the men charged with starting a new world-wide movement. And yet, when they experienced the truth of the risen Lord, when they encountered their friend once more, their lives changed direction. And they change from this timid, confused, scattered group of men, to men of courage and conviction. They leave their old lives behind. They spread out to the furthest ends of the empire. And almost all of them will suffer the martyr's death. They encounter – they meet – the risen Lord and the reverberations of this shake them to the core and they reorient the whole of their lives. Their witness: turn to the Lord!

Faith in Christ risen from the dead saw the first believers *give up* the sabbath - the principal marker of their identity as Jews - by coming instead to celebrate the Lord's Day: this Day, the day of resurrection! The very ordering of their week now gave witness to the Resurrection. They knew the Lord to be risen and so turned their lives – ordered their lives, even their week - to him. This witness: turn to the Lord!

Faith in Christ risen from the dead gave *assurance* to countless thousands of men, women and children, who were willing to lay down their lives for this truth. Beheadings, crucifixions, stonings, flayings, burnings. Every conceivable depravity human beings have been capable of concocting Christians have been subjected to. From Rome in the first century to Syria, China, North Africa today. They suffer and die because they know the truth of what we celebrate today – Christ is risen! The martyrs show that not only their lives, but their deaths as well, are oriented to Christ. Their witness: turn to the Lord!

Faith in Christ risen from the dead has compelled generation after generation of faithful men and women to proclaim the good news in lands near and far. There is no other inspiration that could compel them to leave home, comfort, familiarity, safety other than love of the Lord and the desire to share his good news. Today, we hear that the efforts of missionaries ought to be dismissed as nothing other than colonial expansion. But for so many of the world's peoples, Christ's victory over death has been a word of liberation! And for those who have shared it, their witness: turn to the Lord!

Faith in Christ risen from the dead has indeed been a liberating power for millions of new Christians who have converted from other faiths, or none. Today, in this country, hundreds will be baptised committing their life to Christ, and asked, *do you turn to Christ?* The good news of Christ's victory over death has freed countless people from fear and superstition; from fear of appeasing blood-lusting gods, gods who demand child sacrifice or make demand to kill oneself in explosive vests. The gospel has delivered countless peoples from the terror they lived under in pagan religions and liberated them from the ancestors. Those who have converted from other faiths have done so with *profound gratitude!* People accept and welcome the good news because they find in it the source of life, peace, hope. They turn to the Lord and find freedom from fear! Their witness: turn to the Lord!

And by the third century, as soon as Christians were able, they built churches oriented to the east, to the rising sun, to the dawn. Our churches became a living sign and symbol that by facing the rising sun we were orienting our lives to the Risen Son. Our worship giving expression to the essential truth: *that we should turn to the Lord.* In this church too, we face the East; we turn and face Him who is risen. We turn and face him so that he may dawn in our hearts and lives. We face the rising sun because we live in hope of the Risen Son. The witness of this place: turn to the Lord.

My brothers and sister, the Resurrection has consequences. Easter is now. Easter belongs to all times and seasons. Jesus is alive, still showing up as a transfiguring, life changing power. Jesus is not over, and his story is not over. Easter isn't just something we remember. It's something we live and breathe, as the long history of the church has shown: ripples and reverberations going out and shaking lives and the world from the empty tomb on Easter day until now.

Resurrection has consequences and is more than an idea we talk about or even an article of belief we seek to prove. Resurrection is something we become, something we “prove” in the living of our lives. The Resurrection calls us to turn and face the light. Amen.