

Acts 10:34-43; 1 Cor 15:19-26; Jn 20: 1-18

The Resurrection of Jesus as an event in itself was strictly between Jesus and God – there were no earthly witnesses.

No one saw *what* happened in that tomb after Jesus had been laid inside and the cave sealed.

There are witnesses to Jesus' birth, to various of his miracles and to his teaching. People witnessed the Spirit of God descending upon him at this baptism, and his transfiguration – those moments of glory – and his death on the cross – a different kind of glory.

But to the resurrection itself – no one was there – no one saw it because they were all still in bed that morning, or in hiding.

They were witnesses after the fact,
which makes me wonder if the point we are to get
is not the what or how of what happened,
but the therefore, the 'so what?' of Easter.

However it actually happened, Jesus' ministry,
through the resurrection, has been vindicated.

Who Jesus was; what he stood for;
it is these that are shown to be un-killable.
God's love for the world;
God's desire for justice, peace, and reconciliation;
these are stronger than the worst the world can do.

But these witnesses after the fact are
our representatives -
Peter and 'the other disciple' –
and Mary most particularly.

Mary is first to discover the tomb empty –
and she runs to get the others – Peter and his colleague –
they take a look inside – it's empty –
and one of them at least, we are told,
'believes' as a result –
even though they don't understand –
I find that heartening –
that belief and faith can come before understanding –
it's ok to not have everything worked out.

So these two see the tomb is empty,
believe but don't understand –
and then they 'return to their homes'.

What?

They just go home?

No dashing to tell others or going to the authorities
and making a fuss – one of our bodies is missing –
perhaps this was just so beyond their ability to compute
that they were in a sense stunned,
a kind of shock, maybe.

Well, thank goodness for Mary who,
for whatever reason, hung around –
already the first at the empty tomb,
now the first to meet the resurrected Jesus,
and so the first apostle, if you like – the first to be sent
the first Easter preacher!

Mary doesn't recognise Jesus until he uses her name.
He gives her a message to take to the others
'say to them "I am ascending to my Father
and your Father, to my God and your God"'

It is, in a nutshell, what he has been teaching them
over the previous few days at least –
if we were to read from chapter 13 onwards
in one sitting –
in this that Jesus says to Mary now
we would hear echoes so much of what he said to her
and the others in his teaching at the last supper,

he has spoken about his need to go away
in order that the Advocate will come, he has told them –

I am going to the Father –
he has told them in so many words –
I've got to go, don't hang on to me.
And he reminds Mary of that now,
and she is to go and announce his
resurrection and imminent ascension –
which will mean the coming of the Holy Spirit.

What is happening here
is the ever-continuing movement of God forward.

Easter doesn't return Mary and the others to the past –
it doesn't make it "as if Jesus had never died" –
it is a progressive action –
just as Jesus says to Mary "I am ascending..."
there is forward motion.

We humans are people of time and place –
all our experience is based on what has happened –
future exists only in our imagination,
which is also a product of our experience.

And that can mean that the things we hope for
can look remarkably like the way things used to be –
if we are ill we might think back to a time when we weren't
and wish it was like that again,
if a relationship is struggling we wish
it could be like it used to be, once upon a time –
we do it even as a society –
somehow previous generations were always happier,
or more community minded, or more respectful of others,
than current.

And to be sure –
previous state may well have been better
than the present one –
but resurrection –
the continuing ministry of Christ and movement of God –
is about taking what is and transforming it into
something entirely new and previously unknown.

Jesus isn't into nostalgia,
he isn't into returning things to the way they were
as being the best outcome –

If you explore his earthly ministry,
his teaching and healings were signs of that –
he healed people, yes, but it was never just a
'return to the way things were' before they got sick –
there was something more involved.

That is why being one of God's people can be
risky and uncomfortable,
because God is in the business, not of change,
even for change's sake,
but of transformation and actual,
never-before-seen newness.

It is certainly not about what we think is best
or even what we think is possible.

Our hope as the people of God has to be based a vision
of the kingdom of God that is to come
not on some idealised version of what has already been,
as we have experienced it.

We need to separate hope from experience
because at best it limits us
and at worse it can totally debilitate us
- does anyone else's thinking sometimes
go along the lines of –
well tried that and it didn't work –
not going to do that or anything like it again?
we can get it as individuals
and we can get it too in any community.

But if Easter means anything –
it means we can take risks
as the risen Jesus ascends
and sends us out and goes before us –
if we can dare to let go of our ideas
of what we think is best, because that is the past –
dare to let go of the fears that the past
has got us cornered into –
that things won't, can't, don't, work out -
because they never do...

I made an Easter Resolution yesterday
as I was thinking about this sermon –
I'm not going to tell you what it is –
it's not a big thing –
but it's something about which I'm inclined to think –
“oh that will never change – it's always going to be...”
and as I was writing this sermon I thought –
well maybe I should listen and act on my own urging.

I can't imagine how this something can be different
but I don't have to,
and it's probably better that I don't try
because literally – God knows
the past can hang on to us even as we hang on to it –
but the resurrected Christ calls us out, ever onward
to more than we can think of or even imagine.

So what might your Easter Resolution,
your resurrection prayer, be?
What is the thing for you about which you are inclined to think
– I wish that was how it used to be
or about which you've given up hope of it being different
can no longer imagine a future for.

What ever it is you are in the best possible place.

God isn't in the business of 'back to normal',
or how things were
God comes to do a new, entirely different –
beyond-our-imagining – thing.

And without understanding sometimes
we are to have faith like Peter and his colleague
and trust like Mary.

so that not just today, but in days to come
we can say together
Christ is risen – he is risen indeed. Alleluia.