

Easter Message 2015 Seeds Blossoming Into Human Shapes of Eternal Life

The Resurrection stories of the first Christians that we find stylised now in the Gospels were a daring attempt to incorporate something new into belief-in-God conceptual structures in the world. Humanity turns destructively **in on itself** without a spiritual dimension to soften its persistent aberrations to power and arrogance. The term “spiritual dimension” is intentionally broader than definitive belief in God. Moreover, Humanity turns **against** itself when it restrains the fluid ‘shape’ of the Spirit in the cast iron rules of religion. **We are never more fanatical than when we are playing god and enforcing restrictions that may actually be against God.**

Resurrection was not a new concept. Some Jews kept it in their heart as an expectation, but others, such as the fervent Sadducees, rejected it as a solution to the perennial human problem of mortality and the threat of finitude.

Jesus announced that it was going to happen to him, and that both Jews and Gentiles would be party to his death. Jesus’ prophetic insights were fulfilled. He saw in his prophetic vision a way through death that he called “being raised”. Paul echoes this in words written prior to the resurrection texts in the Gospels when he notes that Jesus “was raised by the Spirit of holiness” (Roman 1:4). Jesus’ prophecy about his death and resurrection was retroactive. That is, it came ‘back’ to him and drew him into all that he prophesied.

The uniquely Christian notion of resurrection that centres on Jesus came from him. It stemmed from his passionate interest in the restoration of humanity to a new vision that he associated with his own self-realization in his pilgrimage. The Letter to the Hebrews traces this development without apology. It is obvious, though not ceded by either the Church or Christian conservatives, that Jesus had no professed idea that he was divine or even totally connected to God as a child and youth. The sparse comments about him in his early years tell us nothing about his consciousness of actual divinity. How could any such words be uttered by anyone without violent reactions from the Jews? Even the towering figures of Moses and Abraham and Elijah had no such illusions despite their experiences of the “living God.” But as an adult in his ministry Jesus began to make prophetic statements

about his death and resurrection. He also spoke of the “Son of Humanity” being glorified which could apply to no other person than himself. He spoke of his “hour” that was coming and the expectations that were attached to it.

The resurrection notions of Jesus are connected to views still current in his day about a General Resurrection at the Last day. But he clearly saw his death and resurrection as pre-empting all current speculations. The unfolding of his life had brought him to the Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. It was followed by his ministry in Galilee that would never be forgotten. One day he stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and poured out the glory of God from his own person. His healings were a line drawn in the sand against disease and fear of natural disasters. His teaching plumbed the depths of the human soul like Jeremiah and Isaiah had done before him. He looked into the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel and saw not only the restoration of Israel but also the possibility of his own crowning restoration. His ultimate act of his healing was his death and its vindication in his resurrection.

The details of the last week of his “truly human” existence on earth still fascinate us, though they are incomplete. But the utter originality of his lived-out notions of resurrection is still hard to grasp. He looked unblinking into the face of death and experienced our obvious fears and apprehensions. But in the encroaching darkness he saw his own overcoming of it as he recalled and renewed his prophetic words about it. Only the love of God and the transforming glory of God could help him now as he recounted within himself the words that he had said at key points in his ministry beforehand. They did not reassure his followers. They frightened them. Now they came together as verbal keys to crack the code of death and its suffocating darkness. He heard it as from a distance and yet felt within himself the transforming power of God raising him up through his pain in anticipation of his ultimate raising into life. He may have revisited his conception in the Spirit and his birth into human light in those moments.

Resurrection does not demand blind faith or need dogmas to protect it from unbelief. But it does imply complete trust in the growth and outcomes of the person uplifted in the story of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Resurrection is not about the raising of an impersonal Messiah coated in glory from the beginning of his existence. It is about someone who was one of us. He carried a fresh vision of humanity that developed within the context of his own growth as a person. He also had a deep-mind vision of God who draws us into his heart of love.

Mary is not recorded as seeing Jesus after his death. But she saw who he was as the angel had prophesied long before his death. No son can successfully hide a heart secret from his mother for long.

When he cried, she cried. When he was joyful, she joined him. When he died she felt the spear that pierced his side piercing her heart also.

Jesus was received into the arms of his mother at birth and into the arms of his heavenly Father at death. It might be appropriate to imagine someone called Joseph as the first person to greet him in the heaven.

The events of holy week have some synchronicity in the unfolding of our own story.

We too have our moments of joy and even triumph. We too are forced to go where we do not want to go as was prophesied also of Peter. We too stand on trial and bear crowns of thorns that others place on our head; we too are sentenced as being unworthy and belittled. We too carry our burdens like the Christ on the Via Dolorosa. We too will die, sometimes suffering the sense of loss and rejection that debilitating illness brings. We too will burst into blooms of resurrected life when the spirit ignites the seed planted by the Master Sower. Then the Spirit brings the flowers of the Spirit out into the pure light of God like the light of the Sun on earth.

Jesus rose into God as he had prophesied. When we say joyously, “He is risen indeed” on Easter Day we affirm and foretell our own resurrection.

Amen

Bishop Arthur Jones

THIS WEEK:

Wednesday, April 8.

- Bible study, 10 a.m.
- Group discussion, 7:30 p.m., Parish office.

Thursday, April 9.

Legal holiday. Office closed.

NEXT WEEK’S READINGS:

Acts 3:12a, 13-15, 17-26

Psalms 111

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31