

“Resurrection is Here and Now”

Grant Bullen

Introduction

“Resurrection is not a one-time miracle to be proven; it is a manifestation of the wholeness that we are meant to experience, even in this world.”¹

That’s a quotation from Richard Rohr, the Franciscan scholar whose reflections have provided the inspiration for my preaching on The Resurrection in the past weeks.

As we get deeper into the Easter Season, the Gospel texts start to *lean* towards the arrival of the Holy Spirit. And so today, the 6th week of Easter, *John* records Jesus speaking of the coming of the Spirit of Truth, the Advocate. It is the Spirit of Christ Jesus who will accompany us in living the resurrected life. But this year I’m in no rush – I want to linger with our exploration of The Resurrection. (We’ll get to Pentecost soon enough!) And so today’s topic is... *‘Resurrection as a here-and-now experience, not something reserved for the next life’*.

Richard Rohr is critical of ‘recent’² church teaching in this regard, alleging that we’ve had so little inner experience of resurrection as *present* life... that we’ve stopped preaching it... stopped believing in it even. And so everything has been about resurrection *in heaven* – an escape from *this* world and *this* present – after we die. But resurrection is not only about an eternal life of bliss in the future beyond death; it’s about now... what Rohr calls a *“present life of eternal significance”*.

So let’s return to The Resurrection as both scripture and tradition portray it...

Bodily Resurrection

As challenging as it is, the Faith insists on a *bodily* resurrection – the tomb is empty... Christ appears in bodily form... he even breaks bread and eats fish (to prove he’s not a ghost).

¹ Richard Rohr, *Daily Reflections*, 20 January 2016.

² By which I think he means at least a century or so...

One thing this tells us is that The Resurrection is located *here...* in *this* world and in *these* bodies of ours – here... *not* somewhere else. The Risen Christ has not left us... not left the human sphere. His resurrection does not occur in heaven.

And the faith says that he's revealing who *we're* created to be; he's revealing the goal, the fullness and the fulfilment of humanity. Who we *can* be in the grace of God's transforming Spirit... in *this* life. The tradition shocks us by regularly saying, Christ takes on human nature in order that we may come to put on his divine nature. Ignatius amplified this when he said,

*"Few people understand
what God would accomplish in them
if they were to abandon themselves
unreservedly to Him
and if they were to allow His grace
to mould them accordingly."*

And all of this is talking about *this* life... not the *next*. We are created... set free... and empowered to live that very fullness of life we see in Christ, here and now.

The Wounded Christ

The resurrection accounts also make it clear that the Risen Christ still carries his wounds... hence the prominence given to the Thomas story, where Christ demands the disciples pay attention to his wounded hands, side and feet... '*See... touch... and know that it is indeed me!*' The Risen Christ is wounded **and** resurrected... at the same time... in the same experience of *new* (resurrected) life. And this is what is offered to us here and now.

This stops us getting lost in some fantasy of idealised perfection... where Christians walk around in *Teflon* skin living an always-happy, suffering-free existence... without pain... without struggle. That's **not** the resurrection life. In the new life of Christ *we* carry *our* wounds! Resurrection faith lives in the reality we inhabit, and says that even in this wounded and wounding world, we can be transformed into the brightness of the risen Christ.

Now... Not Only Then

So resurrection life begins here and now... Richard Rohr says,

"We are at home both here and forever... Heaven is first of all now... and therefore surely later. Why not jump on this wonderful bandwagon and enjoy heaven now...?"

The business of *how* we live the resurrection life is the subject of our preaching for 52 weeks... and certainly we do need to very quickly bring the work of the Spirit into this story, for it is God who empowers this transformation within us. But Richard Rohr (again) places a lot of confidence in the difference that simple acceptance of The Resurrection can make to how we live. That is, imbibing in head and heart that resurrection life *is* actually reality.

*"Once you know there is an implanted and positive direction to creation you can go with that flow (faith);
eventually you'll learn to rest there (hope);
and you can actually live this outflowing life with gracious trust (love)."*

I think he's right. Life *is* so different if the Resurrection opens us to the true reality of '*all this*'... and rather than striving and struggling, we can instead go with the flow... the movement of creation... the river of love... resting in the luminous vastness of God.

Conclusion

The American poet, Wendell Berry, said...

"The question before me, now that I am old, is not how to be dead, which I know from enough practice, but how to be alive..."

He also wrote my favourite 'resurrection' poem; a free-spirited, wild and counter-cultural, beatitude-like piece called "*Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*".³ Here's a short excerpt...

*"So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.*

*Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.*

³ "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" from *The Country of Marriage*, 1973

Ask the questions that have no answers.

*Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is highest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection."*

Practise resurrection! Indeed... we do have to go a *bit* wild and take the risk of *practising* the resurrection lifestyle... here and now. Why wait until we're dead?