

## RESURRECTION IS TRANSFORMATION

Acts 10. 34-43

Colossians 3. 1-4

John 20. 1-18

I speak to you in the name of † the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Shock. Amazement. Disbelief. Fear. When Jesus's disciples discovered that he had risen from the dead, you could have knocked them over with a feather. According to St John's Gospel, it was Mary Magdalene who first went to our Lord's grave early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark. No doubt Mary wanted to observe the rituals that accompany the grief of losing a loved one: to anoint Christ's body, and to do what was required. Of course, Mary didn't have any hope that doing these things would make anything better; it was simply what you did in such situations. Yet as she approaches the tomb of Jesus, she sees that the stone has been rolled away. Immediately, she fears the worst; and goes back to fetch Simon Peter and John. When the three of them return, they find themselves confronted with an empty tomb, with the linen wrappings neatly folded. And it is Mary who is given the privilege of seeing our risen Lord first. She can hardly believe her eyes, and runs back to tell the other disciples, 'I have seen the Lord!'

It is a tragedy, is it not, that we have become so comfortable with the Easter story that it somehow fails to surprise us anymore. We've heard the story so many times; we know the ending; and as time goes on, the resurrection becomes something we sit easily with. It is something that seems to make sense; it is like one of our favourite bedtime stories, with a 'happily ever after' ending. As a result, we fail to stand amazed at the empty tomb. We shrug off Christ's death as if it were mere inconvenience; play-acting, rather than a concrete ending.

But we are forgetting one very important thing. Dead people simply do not come back to life. No matter how hard we hope and wish it were otherwise, it doesn't happen today, and it didn't happen back in first-century Palestine. There is nothing more final than death; or so we tend to think. Viewed in this way, the resurrection almost seems scandalous; it is a contradiction of the way in which the world works. And yet there Jesus is: standing before Mary, standing before his friends, speaking, eating, showing them his battle scars. He is a living, breathing contradiction.

Our Lord changes everything. Forget what you thought you knew about life and death. Believing in the resurrection is not just a form of optimism - an 'it'll be all right in the end'. It is deeper and broader and far more demanding than that. The story of Christ rising from the tomb should stop us dead in our tracks. We must unlearn our weariness with the narrative and hear it for what it truly is. We must follow our feet and stand astonished with the disciples at the empty tomb; for truly, there is no such thing as a 'lost cause' in God's kingdom. Nothing is beyond redemption. This is an audacious claim, but it is true.

The resurrection is anything but humdrum.

Nor is the resurrection just about putting things back to how they were before. Jesus endured torture and death before he could come out the other side, and his resurrected body bore the scars and the weight of that reality. His resurrection did not 'undo' his death as though it had never happened; he was revived, restored, but also somehow *changed*. So it is when we experience a dramatic turnaround in our own lives, thanks to the loving touch and power of God. The healed body does not forget its illness; the recovered alcoholic still remembers what it was like to live with severe addiction; the mother reunited with her child does not forget the pain of separation. Instead of superficially 'fixing' what was broken, resurrection is actually

transformation: and in God's kingdom, resurrection often leads to the transformation of body, of spirit and of relationships.

Resurrection isn't just God's business; it is ours too, if we choose to follow him. An invitation to follow our Lord is an invitation to take up one's cross, to walk the dark and difficult road to where God leads us. But it is also an invitation to share in Christ's resurrection life and body. As we turn to God in faith and ask him to intervene in our lives and circumstances, he will give us new life; a new way of living; a new hope; a fresh start. And he will do that for all of those who believe in him and follow him.

The Church is often referred to as 'the body of Christ' in the world today. If we are to take this designation seriously, we must act like the body of Christ: like those who have endured pain and suffering in the service of others, but who have also experienced God's resurrection and the transformation of our own lives. Such transformation is never a purely personal affair. It will always be for the greater good and for the wider community as well. Transformed people naturally offer transformation to others. You and I are called to nothing less than this: to live lives that are transformed by God's audacious love, so that those around us may know resurrection, transformation and hope.

Amen.