Easter 2004

Luke 24:1-12

'We know finite disappointment, but we know infinite hope.' Martin Luther King Jnr

Introduction

It's wonderful to think that at the heart of our faith it's LIFE we affirm,
the life of God bursting through a decaying world.
On this day each year we celebrate afresh the rising of Christ,
the defeat of death, the victory of hope.
Having said that there are definite nuaces in the gospel descriptions of this event which serve to enrich our appreciation.

Two years ago we reflected on Matthew's account.
He speaks of earthquakes, and angels, rolling back the stone.
For Matthew the resurrection is earth-shaking.
People respond differently, but everyone responds.
The most appropriate response is worship.

Mark's account is deeply personal.
He wants us in on the action, indeed, he wants us to finish the story.
The original text ends suddenly and dramatically.
The women flee the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and that's it.
What happens next? We're not told…
It's as if Mark is saying, 'Well I'm not going to tell you how it finishes, because it ain't finished, in fact, that's *your* job,
it's up to you, with your own life, to tell us what happens next.

Luke

This year we focus on Luke.
Again, it's different.
For a start, Luke records three resurrection stories.
The latter two expand our understanding of the first.

For Luke, the Resurrection (like Pentecost), creates a 'butterfly effect.'
It's impact ripples out into the world and across history.
First it's the women,
then the two on the road to Emmaus,
and then the rest of the d's. On and on on it goes until we too are touched.

The other thing that's particularly important for Luke,
is the sense of connectedness.
Luke doesn't want us thinking of Resurrection however earth-shaking or intensely personal, as an isolated and unrelated event.
No, he weaves its meaning into the very fabric of all that's gone before,

and of all that will follow.
His stress is on fulfilment.
The resurrection of the crucified Jesus fulfills God's eternal plan and purpose.

'Remember how he told you,' says the angel to the women at the tomb '*while he was still with you in Galilee: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again."' (7)*

'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all the that the prophets have spoken…' he says to the two on the road… *'and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.' (27)*

You see this stress on connection and fulfillment.
It's similar in the third story.
Luke wants us in no doubt, the resurrection, though surpising to them,
is continuous with all that's gone before.
Is intimately connected with God, and with what God is doing in Jesus,
and with the world, and with what God is doing in us.
As Heather said on Friday, it's all part of the larger story.

If we move into the details we see lots of little connections.

On the first day of the week, Luke begins, at the crack of dawn,
the women return to the tomb with spices for anointing J's body.
They come expecting to deal with the realities of death.
They end up wondering at the possibilities of life!

When they arrive they find the stone is already rolled aside.
Huh, what's going on???
When they enter - no body.

It's interesting, isn't it, the first sign of resurrection isn't presence,
it's absence.
He's not there.

Like most of you, I'm sure, I find God's absence hard, it makes me question his existence,
now I'm thinking, it's not all bad.
Truth is, I'd rather a risen God who seems (at times), removed,
than a corpse always near.
And so the res. seeds hope
even in the difficult experience of the dark night of the soul …

Anyway, back to the story.
No doubt the women are thinking that the body has been stolen.
While wondering, 2 men appear beside them gleaming like lightening.
'Why do you look for the living among the dead?' they ask.

Good question. It's one we prob. need to hear too.
Why do we invest so much time searching for 'life', or what we think makes for life, in such life diminishing pursuits?

He's not here, he's risen, they continue.
Luke is in no doubt as to where life resides.
It is a relationship with Jesus that holds the greatest possibility,
which of course is what he himself had said, on a number of occasions.

On being reminded, the women do recall J's words about dying and rising.
With what seems like the beginning of realisation,
they leave, to tell the others.

The others are far from convinved.
Still, Peter runs to the tomb to see what's going on.
When he gets there he finds the grave clothes, but no body.
Now he's *really* wondering.
I guess the stolen body theory sounds a lot less plausible when you still have the grave clothes.
If I was taking a dead body I'd sure keep it wrapped!

Well, that's where Luke ends his first story, with everybody *wondering.*
There's plenty of hints, but nothing conclusive,
they haven't actually seem him.

When they do, they are utterly convinced –
Jesus has been raised.

Implications

1. Hints are important, if not to convince, then at least to raise the possibility.

Do you notice the hints in your own life?
Do we notice them in our church?
Or are we missing out because we're looking in the wrong place, or perhaps expecting something different?
Something bigger? More obvious? More compelling?
In my experience God, prefers to hint, than to show off.
If we miss the hints we may well miss out.
What are the hints of resurrection in your life???

2. The resurrection, though new, is not imposed or discontinuous.
   It is simply the reality of *God's* life, of God's irresistable life
   breaking into the reality of our lives.

Luke is at pains to point out that this Christ whom God raised
is the same Christ who died,
and that this world in which he was raised,
is the same world you and I inhabit.

Above all, this means **hope**.
If Christ is risen, then life (not death) is the final word.

If Christ is risen, then God *is.*
If Christ is risen, the X who was crucified because he got embroild in our world, then God not only *is*, but is *for us*, ie God *cares.*
That is great news, that is cause for great hope.
It's not that life wont be hard then, at times, it will.
Resurrection doesn't obliterate the old world.
It's not that we wont get sick or die, we will.

But, that's not the whole story,
for the irresistable life of God is also at work in the world.
Yes, we will have sorrow, but not, but never without hope,
for Christ is risen, and that makes all the difference in the world.

I think of Paul, the great preacher of resurrection,
his life was far from easy, and yet, he was always full of hope.
'We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not in despair;
persecuted, but not abandoned;
struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Cor 4:8-9)

That's the impact of the resurrection,
It adds a 'but not' to every difficult story.

'What they did to Jesus, they do to us, Paul says,
-*trial and torture, mockery and murder;* it's all still happening,
ahhh, but *'what Jesus did among them, he does in us—he lives!*
(2 Cor 4: 10 The Message),
That's the power of resurrection, it's the transforming presence of the living, loving God.

3. Witnesses to the resurrection.

I mentioned earlier that for Matthew the true response to resurrection is worship.
I'm sure Luke would have no argument with this,
in his account however he also stresses witness.

We who expereince the awareness of the risen Christ are called to be witnesses to his resurrection.
We see the importance of this in each of his three resurrection stories.

In the first, after their interaction wih the angels, the women race off to tell the apostles. (10)
In the second, after their eyes are opened at the breaking fo the bread, the two men race back from Emmaus to recount their experience to the others. (33)
In the third, Jesus gives them a specific vocation- *'You are witnesses of these things.'* (48)

What does it mean to be a witness to the resurrection?

Is it simply a matter of running around proclaiming - 'He is risen',
Ar we expected run around with a sunny optimism despite the painful realities of evil and death.

Or is there something else?

For me, it's got more to do with what I was just talking about,
with living *'but not'* lives,
with living lives that reflect the character of J, the one who was raised.
ie. lives that are joyful, hopeful, faithful, loving, praising, resiliant, defiant, sacrificial, generous.

A life under the influence of resurrection is a life where
stones of our hatred and greed,
of our apathy and selfishness,
of our pain and despair,
our violence and unbelief, are being rolled away.

A life under the infuence of resurrection is a life which bit-by-bit is being transformed by the risen presence of God.

Such a life is deeply compelling.

As the people of the Good Friday and Easter Christ,
this is how we are called to live.
We are the resurrection leven in the world's despairing dough.

We immerse ourselves in the world with all its pain and all its contradictions, as harbingers of hope.

Wherever the world is, wherever we find ourselves,
in the hospital rooms of the incurably ill,
in the homes of the disgustingly rich,
in the corridors of power,
in the cells of prisoners,
in court rooms of justice,
or in the ghettos of oppression,
we live and love as the people of the risen Christ.
We who live and love as if God's tomorrow had taken residence in humanities today,
which of course it has!!!

Prayer

Lord, he is risen, *let him easter in us,*
be a dayspring to the dimness of us,
be a crimson crested east… G.M. Hopkins