

Paul's Perspective – the Resurrection and us 2 Corinthians 4:7 – 5:10

By
Neil Millar

Over the past few years, it's been a great joy, and personally, very helpful, to focus on the unique way in which each of the gospel writers presents their account of the resurrection.

As I've done this, I've discovered that each has an important dimension to add to the picture.

For Matthew, the event is earth shattering, its implications, world changing.

Matt alone; tells of the earthquake, which rolls the stone from the tomb.

Like a tsunami, waves of resurrection life envelop the universe.

Lives are touched...changed... forever!

Mark's account is very different.

In Mark, the women rush out the empty tomb afraid and astonished, and that's it... end of gospel...

Mark just leaves it hanging.

What happened next?

We're not told, (although a few zealous editors have added their thoughts).

No, Mark wants *us* to write the next chapter.

What happens next is up to *us*.

As the resurrection touches us, so the actions continues,
we become part of the story.

With Luke, it's different again.

Luke includes three resurrection stories.

In each, there's an explanation of how this event ties in with God's grand plan – *Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the son of Man must be handed over... and be crucified... and on the third day, rise again*, says the angel to the startled women at the tomb.

Remember, remember what they said, it all fits, it's all there:

in Moses, the prophets, the Psalms...

in the words of Jesus himself...

For Luke, it's about the bigger picture –

J's resurrection is a fulfilment of God's grand plan of salvation.

In John, *seeing* is believing.

John writes to persuade, to testify to the truth.

John's account is full of eye witnesses, and all of them with the same story, he *is* risen.

It's a fact, a historical reality,
many have seen *and* believed.

And on their testimony, he says to Thomas, *blessed are those who have not seen
and yet have come to believe.*

Like I said, it's been really refreshing, listening in to 4 parts of this exquisite resurrection harmony,

but you know, the gospels aren't the only music we hear.

Throughout the New Testament, there are *many* resurrection tunes –
for Peter also sings,
as does James, Paul, and the writer of Hebrews.

This morning, I thought we'd listen in on Paul,
for of all them, his is most fulsome song.

I couldn't hope to share it all in one sermon,
instead, let's listen to the NT reading we heard a just few moments ago.

On first hearing, 2 Corinthians 4 and 5 may not sound much like a resurrection song –there's a lot there about decay and death–
but if we listen closely, carefully,
we begin to hear the melody beneath each thought and line.

In particular, Paul reflects on how resurrection impacts *our* lives.

If Christ *is* risen, *then what does that mean for the church?*
What does it mean for each of us?
How does it impact our living?

Does it mean, for example, having a glamorous and impressive ministry –
signs and wonders at every turn,
big buildings, big crowds, big success, big money?

If it does, then no wonder the Corinthians are questioning P's credentials,
his ministry was *far* from glamorous – frustration, beatings, rejection,
shipwreck, imprisonment, sickness – these things had dogged him, there was
no escaping it.

If this is what it's about, then where's *his* resurrection ministry?

And, what about us?

If *this* is what it's about, what's wrong with *us*?
For, even today, we cannot pretend, can we?
We know these troubles, only too well.

If resurrection spells victory, if Christ has conquered sin, and suffering, and pain, and death, then where's the evidence?

Well, says Paul, actually, it *is* here, in my ordinary, fragile *clay jar* life, and in yours.

Treasure in *clay jars*! Extraordinary power in *ordinary* lives! *That's* the evidence (2 Cor 4:7).

The fact that fragile, K-Mart, clay lamp, lives like yours and mine can light a dark room - a dark *world* - *that's* the evidence.

The *jars of clay* mentioned in v7 were the small pottery lamps found in every home.

When these *ordinary* lamps are filled with the oil of the Spirit of the risen X, something *extraordinary* happens – light... love... life!

It's not that we don't *suffer* anymore,
we do.

It's not that things aren't hard or challenging or disappointing at times,
they are,
sometimes for Xns, it's worse.

It's not that we don't grow sick or weary or die.

No, the *evidence* of resurrection comes with the testimony that these things do not defeat us,
do not get the upper hand.

It's called *resilience* and it comes from resurrection hope.

We are afflicted in every way, says Paul, as much as anyone, and more,
but not crushed.

perplexed, but not driven to despair;

persecuted, but not forsaken;

struck down, but not destroyed;

Resurrection people are '*but not*' people

You want evidence of resurrection in the age of sickness and suffering?
Look for signs of hope-filled resilience.

You see, J's resurrection inaugurates the New Age,
even though the Old Age is yet to conclude.

The end *will* come, when Christ returns,
and with it, the end of sin and death.
In the meantime, we live in-between –
 in the Old Age, with all its challenges,
 and in the New, with all its possibility.

When things are hard,
it *doesn't* mean that Christ didn't rise,
or, that God doesn't care,
it just reminds us that we're *not yet* fully free,
as children of the New Age we still share in the fellowship of his suffering.

The *difference*
is *hope*.

While we're not yet *fully* free, we know that one day we will be,
 for X is risen!
Death is no longer the *last* word.
We have hope, says P,
 for we know that if the earthly we live in is destroyed,
 we have a building from God, a house not made with hands,
 eternal in the heavens (5:1)

In knowledge of this hope, with help from the Spirit of the risen X, our present living is transformed.

One of the most compelling signs of the resurrection in our world, then,
is the testimony of our resilience.

- The fact that we're afflicted but *not* crushed
- The fact that we don't lose heart, even though we are wasting away
- The fact that our inner nature is *being renewed*, day-by-day
- The fact that we look not at what *can* be seen - the temporary,
 but at what cannot be seen - the eternal
- The fact that death no longer terrifies us, even though dying still causes concern
- The fact that we *walk by faith, not by sight*.
- The fact that we live such that we do not fear the day *when we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ*.

When some people contemplate the resurrection, they forget that it was the *crucified* Lord who was raised.

To expect all roses in life is not faith, certainly not Xn faith,

it's what theologians call *over-realised* eschatology –
Easter day without Good Friday,
resurrection without *crucifixion*,
the New Age without the Old.

This kind of faith hardly sees us through Easter Day, let alone the rest of the year!

Then again, to expect *all thorns* isn't faith either,
this is the cross without Easter day.
This kind of faith won't sustain us either.

Xn faith takes hold of the *crucified* and *risen X*,
it suffers, as X did,
but not without hope,
for *X is risen*.

Resurrection people are resilient people, '*but not*' people,
we're also *defiant* people, 'why not' people.

We walk by faith not by sight, says Paul says (5:7).

If you have no confidence in the resurrection,
then you will fight to *preserve* your life at all costs.
Of course you will, it's all you've got!

But if you know X, the *risen X*,
if you have *confidence* in his promise of *eternal* life,
if his *extraordinary power* works in you,
then you will *risk* your life for his sake,
for you know - whatever happens - the best is yet to be.

Paradoxically, one of the clearest signs of X's resurrection in *our* lives
is our willingness to *invest*, to *lay down* life, for his sake.

That's what it meant for Paul—
Always being given up to death for Jesus' sake,
so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh (4:11).

Resurrection people are '*why not*' people.

We dare to dream *Kingdom* dreams,
and to *give* ourselves in the cause.

And so, despite the obstacles, we have a crack at a new ministry, a new building program – *why not?*

We look at that person who's let us down and we say *why not?*
Why not forgive them, why not give them another go?

We look at our hardened work colleague or spouse and we say *why not?*
Why be vulnerable, and pray, and share with them?

We look at the evidence of global warming and we say *why not?*
Why not make a change in my lifestyle?

We look at the MDG to halve the no. of people without access to safe water and we say, *why not?* Why not have a go at it?

Many of you remember Agaw and Abuk from our Dinka community. True Easter people. Right now they're back in Sudan, back rebuilding their ravaged land. They have few resources and even less certainty that it won't all be undermined again. And yet, they spend themselves in the work.

What's the point? Some say, why bother?
To which they answer: *why not?*
Why not, for Christ is risen.

According to Paul, the resurrection is revealed *most* powerfully in *our* attitudes and actions.

As Xns (Christ's people), we are neither defeated, nor triumphant, but rather, patient,

resilient,
trusting,
daring,
loving,
defiant.

As Xns, we are *always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.*

So,
this Easter,
let him easter in us,
for Christ **is** risen!
He is risen indeed!

Prayer

Lord, we ask that you would *easter in us*,
that you would *be a dayspring to the dimness of us*,
that you would *be a crimson-crested east...*

this day, and every day of our eternity. Amen