

THE RESURRECTION of OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST 21 April 2019

A Homily preached by the Reverend Roger B. White, Rector of St Andrew's Parish, Kent, Connecticut

Acts 10.34-43; Psalm 118.1-2, 14-24; I Corinthian 15.19-26; Luke 24.1-12

Today, we hear the astonishing story again. Sometimes we hear it in Matthew's version, sometimes in Mark's, sometimes in John's; and this morning we hear it as Luke tells it. There are differences among the four accounts, and they reflect both the different traditions that the Gospel writers inherited, as well as the points that each of them think are important.

In Matthew and Mark, two Marys encounter an angel (in Matthew's, after a great earthquake); in John's telling, it is Mary Magdalene alone who makes the discovery of the empty tomb, and there is no angelic appearance. In Luke's Gospel, it seems that several women, including Marys, come to the tomb, where they meet two angels. In Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's Gospels, the first words of the angel(s) are similar –'He is not here, he is risen'—and only in Luke's Gospel, as we have heard, do the angels explain, 'Remember how he told you ... that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and on the third day rise again'.

And this is one of Luke's little ... 'tics', as it were –what makes Luke's take on things ... well, Luke's. As the Passion story begins and in the courtyard of the High Priest, after Peter has for the third time denied ever having known Jesus and the cock crows, Peter 'remembers the word of the Lord, how he said to him, "Before the cock crows today you will deny me three times".' Luke is always directing us back to what Jesus has said, reminding us of what we were told, of what we were supposed to have noticed, learned. And he is on to why we very much need to have the invitation, year in and year out, to reread, here once more, the words of Jesus in order more and more to realise how deeply true they increasingly ring.

The Psalmist writes

*That which we have heard and know
and what our forebears have told us,
we will not hold from their children.
We will recount to generations to come
The praiseworthy deeds and power of the Lord,
and the wonderful works the Lord has done. [Psalm 78.3-4]*

And this is so much ... of Luke, too. We are to listen and notice and think, and the more true the words come to be, the more important it is for us to share what we are coming, once again, to know Luke repeatedly sends us back to recall what Jesus says, and then to notice how more and more deeply true it is and to make it known.

Forgive, and you will know forgiveness Give and will be given to you The measure that you give will be the measure that you get back It is more blessed to give than to receive All of these teachings of Jesus are deeply true, and we need to hear them, take them in, again and again. It is why we hear the Gospels, again, and again, and again And these are truths that we simply must pass on

But before the angels at the tomb ask the women at the tomb to think back on what Jesus had said and understand that it was true –that he was handed over to wicked, threatened people who mercilessly crucified him, and has now risen to new and different life—the angels begin by asking them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’ Only in Luke’s Gospel is this ... searing question posed: ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’

Curiously, years after my parents retired and moved away from the suburb of Chicago in which I grew up, my two apartment-mates from graduate school –Jim and Mary—themselves moved there. And, so did Mary’s best friend, her husband, and their children, buying the house in which I had grown up. And so several years ago, when I visited Jim and Mary, we had the invitation to come by so that I could see what had become of my ... former home.

It was an odd experience. The same door chimes, with their distinctive tones, were in the same niche in the middle of the ground floor; and the bookcase that had been built into an eave in my bedroom was still very much there ... except that I recognized none of the spines on the shelves. The dining room windows overlooked an almost familiar lawn, but the tall elm tree was gone; in the kitchen, the appliances were in different places, and the pantry had altogether vanished, had become part of the kitchen.

My eyes kept looking for what had been, and were not taking in what was now really there: I was not taking in what a beautiful home Mary’s friends had made for their family. And suddenly, the question of Luke’s angels popped into my mind, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’

Of course I was not looking for the living among the dead, but rather for what was gone amongst that which was burgeoning. And so it is in Luke’s Gospel narrative that when the Risen Christ first appears to his disciples ... they do not recognize him: he is not quite the same –the elm tree is gone and the books are different. They keep looking for the living amongst what was, and fail to take in what is clearly alive in front of their eyes.

All of which is why we need once more to hear the angels’ telling question, Why do you seek the living among the dead? Do you look for God to be, to act, when and where and how you expect, and then not take in when and where and how God is acting, is present ...? The story that Luke tells always invites us to think back on what Jesus says, and always more and more to allow these words to open our ears and eyes and minds and hearts to perceive their truth –to notice what is in fact unfolding around us.

In Luke’s Gospel, the Risen Christ’s final words to his followers are, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all people’. They are over and over again to recall and think on these words and to realise: there is Resurrection, new and changed life. There is forgiveness, and can include everyone. It is true: tell it, live it. The words so prized by Luke are only one way.

A blessed Eastertide to all of you. Amen.