

## Sermon on John 20: 1-18 Resurrected, Seriously

**In Egypt today Christians will gather in the rubble of bombed out churches to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.**

Amid the muck, the charred remains of burnt out furniture, amid even their own fears that such a horror could happen again, they will sing of Jesus' resurrection.

And his triumph over death, death that has come all too close for them these past days.

They will pray.

And they will pray as much for those who have carried out the violence as those who have been victims of it.

The grief of loss will haunt their words and thoughts no doubt.

And the physical signs of the terror will continue to linger all around.

But in those prayers they will embody everything of what Easter is about.

The violence inflicted upon them will not shape who they are.

It will not be their truth.

Their truth, *the truth*, cuts through it, even to the point of compelling them to love and pray for their enemies.

Death really doesn't have the final word. Love does.

This isn't something God tells us, like a warden at a blackboard asking us to copy down our lines.

It is something he shows us, something he embodies, by giving Jesus away to death and raising him to new life beyond death.

When we, with Christians around the world say today, Jesus is risen, death has been conquered, it's not some nice sounding platitude, a spiritual bumper sticker or pithy religious catchphrase.

It is the deepest truth of the universe.

The deepest truth of God.

Our Egyptian brothers and sisters in Christ will live that truth today, at the sharp end of human experience.

And in our worship and witness, and the shared proclamation that Jesus is risen, we will say, we are with you.

**I watched yesterday from my office window as quite a number of people walked by our little Good Friday offering of 'love flowers' out the front of the manse and took one.**

There's still some there if you're interested following church today.

I have no idea what they were thinking, or why they took a flower, or what meaning it might or might not hold for them.

One fellow I saw put it on his back seat so it smiled out the rear window.

But I like to think that in some small way it said to them, God takes you seriously.

Every fibre of who you are, body, mind, and soul.

That somewhere in their hearts it was a message of what worth every person is to God.

God takes you seriously, your life, your experience, your death.

This is the divine love.

That maybe every time they look at that flower they will hear that message.

Whether your life is long or short, it matters to God.

**God takes every person in the world seriously, even those who would perpetrate violence against others.**

Seriously enough for Jesus to implore his followers to pray for their enemies and love those who persecute you.

It's a ridiculous notion unless you've considered the idea that the Saviour himself would die and be raised.

It's a confusing business.

But when Mary is confused in the garden, thinking she is speaking to the gardener, the crucified and resurrected Jesus, scars still showing, utters only one word to set her straight – her name – Mary.

He looks her in the eye, sees her square on, calls her name, and the great realisation washes over her.

I know you, he says, I see you.

At that moment the veil is removed, and she sees the truth fully for the first time.

'Teacher', she responds in a flood of tears and recognition.

She sees, and she knows, and everything changes in that one moment.

**Resurrection faith begins for us all at that same transfiguring moment.**

God looks us in the eye, sees us, says our name.

I know you, he says.

And all of who we are, all our longings, and fractures, and sins, and joys, and troubles, and concerns... all of us, is gathered together in Jesus, and held there in love.

'From now on', Rowan Williams writes, 'all human beings will find who they are, who they may be, where they will be, in relation to the figure of Jesus.'

Jesus takes you seriously enough to die for you, to call you by name.

That you might take him seriously too.

That the veil might be removed from your eyes.

To believe, as our friends in Egypt do, that his resurrection means death does not triumph, even when it is embraced by those who would inflict great harm.

And that we who see by faith, should live into this resurrection life, in our lives.

To take ourselves as seriously as God does, to take his love as seriously as he has offered it.

**It can be scary to be told there is perhaps more to you than you think.**

Most of the resurrection accounts see people startled and afraid.

It takes a reimagining of things to believe Jesus is risen, a kind of trust that only God can make possible.

Fortunately God is in the business of such re-imaginings.

The resurrection of Jesus tells us there's more to come of God, and more to come of you.

Think of the disciples for a minute.

If you could have spoken to Peter following his denials of Jesus and suggested that in a few days' time he would help begin a movement in Jesus' name that would re configure the world forever... I wonder what his response might have been?

Chances are he would have hid his face in shame, never wanting to hear the name of Jesus again.

Let me go back to my quiet life of fishing and forget all this difficult business, he might have said.

Like it was for Mary, for us, for the whole world, the resurrection changed everything for Peter too.

He now had to reimagine his life in every way, as scary as that may be, and see that there was more to him than he might have thought, the resurrected Jesus made it so.

Jesus took him seriously and saw down deep into a life which was still to come, still to be.

And called him to 'feed my sheep', 'feed my lambs'.

And we stand here today still celebrating the resurrection because he did.

He took himself as seriously as God did. And the rest is history.

**The world we live in in the west is keener to distract than destroy us.**

And that can be a potent challenge for a people of faith.

The context we stand in is a society which wants us to believe fulfilment and meaning are found in other places.

Material wealth and comfort, the right kind of pretensions, the god of market economics, individualism, status, success.

They look good on the surface of course, but they're truths built on sand, some of them quicksand.

It's always a conundrum to me though because I've taken a lot of funerals.

And bar none, even when families and friends have struggled to articulate it, when confronted with the finality of death, that unavoidable separation that is set within all human experience, these are not the things they have spoken of.

From the wealthiest to the poorest, they have spoken of relationships, person to person connections, remembered times shared together. Love.

And at the end of each of those funerals the same words have held these far deeper things together... in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lived and died and rose again for us, to God be the glory.

To death and beyond, God takes us seriously enough for Jesus to take us by the hand, look us in the face, say our name, and help us see into the divine truth... the truth of ourselves and the truth of God.

And the divine truth is not a transcending of our fleshly lives, but a transformation of them.

A resurrected life. Seriously.

Today in Egypt, bombed churches, charred walls, burnt furniture, and the memory of lost loved ones will become cathedrals to give thanks to God.

The reality and heartache, the sheer pressure of it all is not put to one side, cleaned up, out of the way.

No, it's transformed.

Strangely, yet wonderfully, like the cross itself, the signs of death, in God's love become signs of hope as a people bear witness to the power of resurrection.

**On Easter Sunday we hear that same message for ourselves and for the world.**

Jesus is risen.

God takes you seriously, your life, your flesh, your experience, your community, even your death, perhaps we should say especially your death.

And transforms it all.

And everything is changed.

'I have seen the Lord.', Mary exclaims to the bewildered disciples.

Perhaps the even more astonishing and profound thing about Easter really is, that he has seen me, called me, loved me, and will so forever.

Resurrected, seriously...

Amen.