

Sermon for Easter Day

Perhaps like me you tend to lump Good Friday and Easter together: God's big happening when He sorts everything out. If so, then it is interesting to try to separate the two out as they have different significances. After all, on the Cross Jesus shouted triumphantly, "It is finished!" The word also means "paid" or "accomplished". So if by the end of Good Friday Jesus' work is finished, what is Easter about?

1/ Firstly, it is God's stamp of approval, his validation, of Jesus and of everything Jesus has said and done. It is all true; Good Friday is good, not a tragic accident to an innocent man or the death of a deluded man, but part of God's plan. St Paul says, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." It's this one historical event that makes or breaks Christianity. If, as Christians believe, Jesus did rise from death, it means that Jesus was and is alive. We are told in the Bible that He is interceding for us ie taking our part, siding with us, acting as our defence lawyer.

2/ Secondly, we are told that the same power which raised Jesus back to life is at work in us! The same power which broke natural laws in bringing someone back to life is now working in us, whether we feel it a lot of the time or not. St Paul talks about our being united with Jesus in his death and resurrection, and also says (in Romans 6:4) that in our baptism "we were buried with Jesus in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too may live a new life." In other words, in God's eyes the change in us when we become followers of Jesus is as dramatic as Jesus' death and resurrection. We are also told that God has raised us and seated us (past tense) in heaven. That's our status and our destiny; and until we go there, He's at work in us making us more like Jesus, with the same power that raised Jesus.

3/ Thirdly, Jesus' resurrection means that his talk of resurrection and of a life after death in not hot air; it's true! There is something after we die. And our relationship with God having been put right through Jesus' death, the way is now open for us to follow Jesus through death and out the other side to be with Him. He's blazed the trail, if you like, and made it possible for us to rise to be with Him rather than to rise to be condemned. Eternal life with Him isn't "pie in the sky when we die"; it's a real hope which we can buoy ourselves up with. And God wants us to buoy ourselves up with it.

4/ Lastly, Jesus' resurrection shows that evil and sin and illness and death will not triumph in the end. All the time the news and our own experiences suggest that dirt and suffering and the things that frighten us are more powerful than the good. We feel that it's only fairy tales that have happy endings. Well, Jesus' resurrection is God's promise that these things, powerful as they are, are not the final word, nor the ultimate authority, but that what is good and holy and right and pure is stronger. This isn't wishful thinking,

our desire to believe in something nice; it is God's verdict; Jesus' resurrection is an event in history. So we can have hope; and we must all costs hang on to that hope - it comes from God!

Let me end with this quotation from Colossians 3: 1-3:

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with God."

Someone once told me, "Keep looking down." That's because if God has raised us with Christ and seated us with Him, then we can keep looking down at the problems because they're underneath us. This Easter let's look at the empty tomb and keep on looking down!

Chris van Straaten