

Christ is Risen!

Luke 13⁶⁻⁹/Acts 2²⁴⁻²⁶

Just as the master was unwilling to discard the Fig tree. Just as he was determined to give it a second chance; just as He was desperate to gain some fruit from it so Easter is the great symbol of God's willingness to give us a second chance; to risk everything on the hope that we will bear fruit for God. Easter is the guarantee of God's not giving up on us; on His determination to love us where we are so that we might be able to journey to where He is.

Christ is Risen! 'He is risen indeed'

Around the world this confession of faith rings today. Christ is not dead. Death could not hold him down. What joy, what amazing freedom, what mystery we now share together as people of faith. Death may continue to win a few battles but the war is lost. O death, where is thy sting? That Christ is risen allows us now to say this of death. Death is not the end – rather it is in God a new beginning.

Even while He was alive death began to let go. His work immediately challenged the domain of death as his own description of His ministry reveals...

⁴Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (Matt 11v5)

Let us also be real here. Death is still a tragedy – it is still loss – it is still a very difficult separation for us and we will always face the pain of death whilst we live this life. But it is not oblivion and in the context of eternity I believe that even that pain and loss will fade into nothing. But the defeat death is not the only consequence of Christ's rising. Christ's rising touches so much else indeed, it

might be said to echo throughout all of Creation. But to understand that work we need to slow down.

The resurrection of Christ is the basis of Christian hope.

²⁴But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. ²⁵For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. (Acts 2)

DO we understand how important hope is in the world today – and, indeed, has always been? To live even in this life requires hope. Without hope life is a dark and depressing attempt to endure; life seems to offer nothing and be worth nothing, death seems a kindness. Millions today live with such thoughts, struggling with depression, grief, loss and loneliness. What is the answer? The answer is hope. When a person finds hope they find something to live for, they find the sun again, they find joy. But where does that hope come from?

The Bible is sure that our hope come from the resurrection – that if you want hope that is going to see the vagaries of this life through – look to Jesus and His resurrection because this is hope that lasts. As Paul said, 'These three remain, Faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.' The greatest is love but hope is that which also lasts!

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The resurrection of Christ is the power of our new life.

Talking the talk is hardly ever a problem in this world. Many can talk up a storm. Walking the walk is always the test whether you're a lawyer or a labourer, a banker or a baker, a doctor or a dock worker – walking the walk is the test. Action, as they say, always speaks louder than words. Nothing could be truer of the Christian Faith. It is one thing to speak of love, it is another to love as we have been loved by God. It is one thing to speak of being generous, it is quite another

to give without prejudice. It is one thing to know Christ, it is quite another to own Him publicly. **Where is the power to live as we should, to walk our walk, to walk, as it were, with Christ? It is in the resurrection.**

¹What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Roms 6)

It is resurrection power that will enable us to walk with Christ. Because Christ is raised I can know His power working in my life if I will but trust Him with that life and hand it over to Him. Christ does not defeat us in order that He might dominate. Rather He desires us that we might become open to His love. Do we know what it is like to be desired, to become the object of affection, to be loved? If you don't, open your heart to Christ. He has desired us from before time and has even died for us.

This is a key dynamic in the Christian life and it's something I think we need to remind ourselves of over and over again. Christ is not only the object of Christian faith but He is the power of our faith – He is the One who makes it happen. Our task is not to do and do but to seek and seek His face. Yes the doing is important but where do the power to 'do' come from? It comes from the person of Christ working powerfully within us. Again Paul reflects this dynamic in his own ministry...

²⁸We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. (Col 1)

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Christ is risen so that the power of God might find its way into my heart and enable me to follow Him.

Christ's resurrection gives life.

¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. (Roms 8)

So often I think we think of what Christ has done in such very narrow terms. It's as if what He has done pertains only to religious life. But Jesus said, '**I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly!**' (John 10¹⁰) Abundant life means precisely that. It means a life that overflows to others, a life that gives life and a life that loves life.

Such a life is often not where we think it might be. It is not found in the excesses of wealth or the glory of the famous or the vanity of the beautiful. But Jesus said, '**³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.**' (Matt 10) The abundance of life that Christ speaks about depends not so much on what we consume, spend or earn but on what we worship. Paradoxically worship of any one aspect of life leads quite often to death. This is the heart of idolatry – the raising of one particular aspect of life to the level of the essence of life. We think of idolatry as the worship of little wooden gods or something similar but we can make idols of anything. We idolise pop and movie stars, sports stars, cars, dresses, houses, relationships, degrees, titles, positions of honour and even our children – and when we do it generally turns out badly for us and badly for those we idolise.

Why do we idolise these things? WE do it because we believe life is in them. Somehow they represent what true life is or should be about and we want a part of it. By association we think we will get life. But Jesus says this...

³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,

will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? (Mark 8)

Resurrection life comes as we trust Jesus with all we have and are. It comes as we deliberately turn away from our own desperate grab at life and trust in His ways...

In his book **Tell It Slant**, author Eugene Peterson uses the short parable in Luke 13:6-9—a parable about manure, of all things—to talk about our need to practice resurrection in everyday life. In the parable, a man has a fig tree in his vineyard that doesn't yield any fruit. Frustrated, he says to the man who takes care of the vineyard that after three years, it's time to cut the thing down. But the caretaker replies, "Leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down." Peterson reflects on how this parable challenges us as believers—a challenge worth hearing at Easter, when we celebrate the power of resurrection. He writes:

Instead of goading us into action, [Jesus' Manure Story] takes us out of action. We have just come across something that offends us, some person who is useless to us or the kingdom of God, "taking up the ground," and we lose patience and either physically or verbally get rid of him or her. "Chop him down! Chop her down! Chop it down." We solve kingdom problems by amputation.

Internationally and historically, killing is the predominant method of choice to make the world a better place. It is the easiest, quickest, and most efficient way by far to clear the ground for someone or something with more promise. The Manure Story interrupts our noisy, aggressive problem-solving mission. In a quiet voice the parable says, "Hold on, not so fast. Wait a minute. Give me some more time. Let me put some manure on this tree." Manure?

Manure is not a quick fix. It has no immediate results—it is going to take a long time to see if it makes any difference. If it's results that we are after, chopping down a tree is just the thing: we clear the ground and make it ready for a fresh start. We love beginning: birthing a baby, christening a ship, the first day on a new job, starting a war. But spreading manure carries none of that exhilaration. It is not dramatic work, not glamorous work, not work that gets anyone's admiring

attention. Manure is a slow solution. Still, when it comes to doing something about what is wrong in the world, Jesus is known for his fondness for the minute, the invisible, the quiet, the slow—yeast, salt, seeds, light. And manure.

Manure does not rank high in the world's economies. It is refuse. Garbage. We organize efficient and sometimes elaborate systems to collect it, haul it away, get it out of sight and smell. But the observant and wise know that this apparently dead and despised waste is teeming with life—enzymes, numerous microorganisms. It's the stuff of resurrection.

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