



Easter Day 2017
Matthew 28:1-10

(The women go to the tomb, as we would to the cemetery, to remember the dead. Despite all they had heard, and all we know now, they did not expect resurrection. They went with heavy hearts, and were met with, what? earthquake, a messenger, and an empty tomb...
Mystery, miracle, something unfathomable, not a resuscitation like Lazarus, but something new, and, in Matthew's Gospel, a dazzling angel, an angel, who like many angels we know says, "*don't be afraid*"... How can I not be with the world as it is?
Ironically, the guards for fear of the same angel "shook and became like dead men" – a great reversal and a touch of humour, who are the dead ones now?

'Do not be afraid,' says the angelic messenger, I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified he is not here for he has been raised, as he said.'.. 'and he is going ahead of you to Galilee' – Back to the beginning, back home. There you will see him.'

What a shock, what a surprise, even though he had talked about it.

How could they believe such a thing? It was so far beyond their experience.

The women, the Marys, no men with them, left in fear and great joy and ran to tell the blokes, still processing the scene and the words.

But wait, there's more...

'Suddenly, Jesus met them and said the same thing, Do not be afraid. "Greetings"'. They knew it was him.

I wonder what he looked like?

'They took hold of his feet and worshipped him', the one who so recently had washed other feet. What an amazing time! How can this be? He too says "don't be afraid, go and tell..."

We replay this story in slightly different versions year by year. For me it never loses its power.)

Ronald Knox described the resurrection as the situation where the "wall became a window"¹. It turns out death isn't an end at all, it is more like a gate. The horizons of God extend beyond this life. And reality is so much larger than we thought it was.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection shine a light on the God, who "raised him from the dead", the one who is love.

There are resurrection stories in other religions, but Christianity is my religion, this is the God I follow, the human, vulnerable, loving God who looks Good Friday in the face and does something quite profound and inexplicable.

So now what? What does it mean to us?

Theologian Sarah Bachelard writes:

'Resurrection life, the experience of the power and joy of resurrection in our lives and the lives of our communities is a gift. It is God who raises Jesus from the dead; resurrection is grace through and through. Or, to put it differently, resurrection is as much kenosis, self emptying, as is crucifixion – we give/yield ourselves into resurrection just as we give ourselves into death (and this can be just as frightening as consenting to die). Sometimes, our experience is still of waiting – still Saturday – and we know that we cannot just 'make' resurrection happen. Any attempt to do so is a fake. Pseudo-joy and pseudo-consummation.'

'And yet – resurrection life is also a practice – Jesus tells his disciples in John's gospel that we know the way to the Father. (John 14:4) If we keep asking 'are we there yet?', if we keep saying 'it' hasn't arrived, then maybe we are waiting for resurrection to dawn on us as a fixed state, an object that will suddenly transform us and 'do it to' us, without our having to take the risk of beginning to live from resurrection in faith. Resurrection has happened. Christ is risen. So what are we waiting for?

Bachelard then gets us to think about resurrection in our own daily lives, she writes:

'Whenever we take the risk of telling the truth in the face of fear, when we take the risk of letting go of cynicism or bitterness to trust again, when we let go of playing it safe to love

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/04/09/3473496.htm> in 'Deep Calls to Deep'

more deeply or make reconciliation possible, then we are living resurrection life. Whenever in times of darkness and despair we cry to God, trusting that God will hear us, then we cooperate with the Spirit of God praying within us just as the Spirit groaned in Jesus' cry of dereliction.

So we do know something of resurrection life in our own experience and we know the difference it makes. We know that we are more alive when we love than when we hate. We know that forgiveness, letting go of grudges and past hurts, brings us peace and life, and that bitterness keeps us captive. Love, truth, compassion, forgiveness – they bring life and, although they can be shaken by fear and suffering, they are always the greater power.

So, you see, we do know the way. Living from resurrection is daring to live as if it were true, even when so much of our lives, in our culture, in our church, in our world, makes it seem a weak and foolish dream.²

This is the culmination of our Lenten journey, of resting in God, of trusting, of hoping, of letting go and letting God.

This Easter, may you open your whole self — heart, soul, mind, and strength — to God's inspiring call to new life and renewed love. May you feel God luring you, prompting you, and encouraging you — each day and in each new present moment — to practice resurrection.³

Michael Leunig, prophet of our time, suggests that for us it is like this:

*That which is Christ-like within us shall
be crucified. It shall suffer and be broken.*

And that which is Christ-like within us shall rise up. It shall love and create.

Clarence Jordan, a twentieth-century Christian saint, said,

The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the full hearts of his transformed disciples. The crowning evidence that he lives is not a vacant grave, but a spirit-filled fellowship. Not a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away church.⁴

Go for it!

The symbol that has arisen for me during lent, as my Lenten study group could tell you is, the sunflower. Early on in lent I went away overnight for a tiny retreat. On the way I stopped off for provisions and as I was paying for for them I noticed some some flowers at a reduced price at the end of the counter. I commented on how beautiful they were in the lady behind the counter said instead of eight dollars, I could have them for four dollars. I said I only had \$1.80. She said they are yours. They looked a bit droopy but I took them with me to my retreat and put them in water and they revived beautifully. I spent time with them then.

When I returned to Sale, the next week the Gippsland Anglican had some flowers on the front cover. I was shocked. Last week I went in search for more sunflowers in sale. I

² handout for a Lenten Study 'Inhabiting the Resurrection' Sarah Bachelard

³ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2012/03/practice-resurrection-progressive-christian-theology-for-easter/#more-1698>

⁴ (quoted in Carl Gregg, "Practice Resurrection": Progressive Christian Theology for Easter, March 30, 2012 5:00 am)

couldn't find any anywhere. One of the florist said they were getting them in the next day. The next day I went and they haven't arrived. I went again the next day and found some tiny little scraggly sunflowers. They were two dollars a stem. I decided that since I have been searching for awhile I would buy them. They have sat on my lounge room table and slowly slowly opened. I have been praying with them knowing that they always turn towards the sun. I am attracted to their yellow petals which are almost translucent. Easter-like. But as I sit with them I notice their Centre, dark symmetrically pattern and carrying the seeds, the seeds of hope. I wonder if there is something of this Lent, holy week, Easter season in them.?

Is it possible that the picture of an empty tomb, angelic being and two women might be a clue? Don't be afraid, he has been there. He is risen..

Susanna

