

## Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2022 – ‘The Hope of Resurrection’ (John 11:20-27, 1 Cor 15:35-44)

**As times of the year go, this is the season of resurrection.** All around us, new life is appearing. The daffodils are blooming, as are the primroses and crocuses. Buds are forming on the trees, the blossom is even coming out in some places. Insects that have been dormant through the winter months are also back – I let out my first big wasp of the year from the bathroom window this morning (don't tell Alise).

We see patterns of death and resurrection throughout nature. Many of you I'm sure enjoyed the latest Attenborough blockbuster series 'The Green Planet'. One of my favourite segments was the lily in South Africa that only flowers after a fire. For 15 years the roots lie dormant underground, but the heat of a seasonal fire stimulates growth and while everything else is ash and charcoal, suddenly these bright red flowers start appearing, poking up through the charred ground.

**Our God is the God of new life. And we as humans were made for life.** Whilst we all have to face the reality of our mortality, there is something deep inside us that yearns for life, real life, what Jesus calls 'zoe life' – true fullness of life. Yesterday I took a funeral for a lady who'd suddenly died, meaning many of her relatives did not get the chance to say goodbye. And as I usually do, at the close of the service I offered this declaration: 'We look for the fullness of the resurrection.' Had the burial taken place there and then, I would have gone on to say: '...in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our frail bodies that they may be conformed to his glorious body – who died, was buried and rose again for us. To him be glory for ever. Amen.'

For all those gathered there at the chapel yesterday what they wanted to hear was not just a celebration of their loved one's life, important though that was – the happy memories and the love they shared. They wanted to know that this was not the end, that there was the hope of new life, of restoration.

This promise of new life lies at the heart of the hope of our faith. And **it is a promise we can be sure of because we worship a Risen Saviour.** The resurrection of Jesus Christ remains the focal point of our hope: St Paul declares at the start of Romans that Jesus was 'proved with power to be the Son of God *by his resurrection from the dead.*' Jesus death and resurrection go hand in hand, and both get equal billing in scripture. Of course there can be no resurrection without Jesus first dying for us, and so we rightly put the cross at the centre of our faith. But if Jesus' death assures our forgiveness and clears the way for deep friendship with God, his resurrection assures us of everything else: his identity, his promise of life, and of the restoration of all things.

And so Jesus can reassure Martha as she mourned the death of her brother: 'Your brother will rise again.' Why? Because Jesus *is* the resurrection and the life. **What Jesus did first he gives to all who trust in him. His eternal life ensures ours.** We too will die – but we will also rise to eternal life. We are made for eternal life in the presence of Jesus, enjoying and worshipping him forever.

And our passage in 1 Corinthians gives us a glimpse of what our resurrected body will be like. St Paul uses four contrasts between our bodies now and what they will be. He describes us now as mortal, blemished, weak and with natural limitations. I can relate to that. But our future bodies will be immortal, glorious, powerful and spiritual. That's something to look forward to, isn't it?

And it's worth stressing that when Paul talks about a spiritual body he still means a real body: we won't just be ghosts drifting around – we will have real substance to us, real physicality – just better than we are now! The best, in fact the only, comparison we have is the resurrected body of Jesus. It was still recognisably him, as the scars he showed Thomas demonstrated: but it was also different, more glorious, not limited by the normal constraints of the human condition.

So all followers of Jesus have a glorious future to look forward to! **God's restoration of all things includes our bodies.** Whilst we will all face death (unless Jesus comes again soon), we all have this glorious hope, indeed the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, when our frail bodies will be transformed to be like Jesus' glorious body, as the funeral prayer puts it.

That is a seriously amazing hope – if that doesn't put a song in your heart today, I'm not sure what will! But it doesn't stop there – or rather, I should say, it doesn't *start* there. Because **this future hope is not just something way off in the distance. The promises of Jesus begin this side of the grave. Resurrection life starts now.** We are united with the risen Saviour *now*. Jesus' life-giving Spirit comes to dwell in us *now*. We may all have to begin that resurrection life with our current limited bodies, but at some level we start to live a new zoe life, spiritual life, resurrection life *today*.

As the baptism service puts it, we 'die to sin that we may live his risen life.' When I say that to the candidate or their family at the start of the ceremony, I'm not talking about heaven, I'm talking about now. As I've said before, **following Jesus is about learning how to live in heaven before you die.** Wow! Just take a moment to absorb that: how would you describe your Christian life? How about this: 'learning how to live in heaven before you die.'

What does that look like? Well, it starts with what we pray every week, maybe for some of us every day: the words of the Lord's Prayer: 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.' Resurrection life is about bringing the life of the kingdom of God into our world now. Tom Wright, whose Lent Course is providing the basis for our series, summarises what bringing this life means under three headings: beauty, justice and compassion.

**Resurrected life celebrates beauty:** I'm not talking about models in a magazine, but cultivating true beauty includes caring for nature and using our artistic gifts. Those of us who have those gifts find them immensely life-giving. Resurrection life calls us to be cultivators and creators.

**Resurrected life unleashes justice** – as we looked at last week, God's heart is to put things right. So we who are made in the image of our life-giving creator work to put things right here in this world – not just for ourselves, but in the service of others.

Finally, **resurrected life offers compassion to a hurting world.** The word compassion means 'to suffer with' – so it is perhaps the most painful part of resurrection living: but again we follow in the footsteps of our risen Saviour, whose compassion changed the lives of many people while he walked this earth. Sadly opportunities to show compassion are in plentiful supply at present.

**So this hope of resurrection is not just for life after death – it's for life *before* death too.** We are called to be life-giving cultivators, creators, people of justice and compassion. This is how we demonstrate resurrection life now, a foretaste of the much greater glory to come. And if what we do now feels life-giving – imagine what heaven will be like?! Amen, come risen Lord Jesus.