



Easter Sunday 2005

Acts 10: 34-43 Colossians. 3:1-4 Matthew 28:1-10

Today we celebrate the pinnacle of all our celebrations as Christians. The ancient cry, "The Lord is risen!" resounds throughout the world.

In the midst of the commercial hype which has lost its religious roots it is a good time to ask ourselves what does this all mean for us today. What are we celebrating?

The reading from Acts is a surprising choice or maybe a sobering one. The preceding story is about the conversion of Cornelius a roman military commander. Peter in meeting him is aware of a great truth of Christian faith.

"I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality. Rather anyone, of any nation, who fears God and acts in a just manner is pleasing to God." Peter says that this is the *Good news of Peace* proclaimed by Jesus. This understanding is a fruit of Resurrection.

In this proclamation Peter announces that there is no reason for religious differences. If we live according to our lights we are all pleasing to God. To live by this Good news of Peace is enough reason for life long celebration.

The letter to the Christian community at Colossae adds a further understanding to Resurrection. To understand the passage we need start the reading at Chapter Two. The writer is concerned about the various additions to the central beliefs of the community. He is particularly concerned with new rules that are springing up which seem to be an attempt to restore old customs. He mentions that circumcision a physical mark of belonging to Judaism is not to be counted as important as Christ's mystical circumcision which is a stripping off of the old ways to live like Jesus.

He then goes on to speak of Baptism which is the lynchpin of our relationship with God through Jesus. He is quite specific about spurious directives. No one is free to pass judgement on what you eat or drink or how you spend time on feast days. We are not to become servile to religious customs that focus on a narrow view of life. These are merely human precepts and doctrines that make a show of wisdom and are affected piety, humility and bodily austerity and are masks for pride.

Our Baptism is a mystical death and resurrection. We are raised up in a real way which signifies our eternal union with Christ. There is no higher life to which we can aspire. This union with God means that our priorities are now God's priorities. The former life with its simple vision has been replaced. The final point the writer makes about this new life, is that the change is not a *visible* one. The reality will be made visible in a share of Christ's glory.

These reflections show how our brothers and sisters in the early Christian communities had developed the early narratives of the Easter morning stories in their attempts to understand the awesome mystery of the Christ event.

Martha expressed the understanding of her time when she said of her brother, "I know that he will rise on the last day".

In Matthew's account of Easter morning with his reference to the early controversies about whether Jesus died, or whether his body had been stolen all point us to the problems encountered in dealing with mystery. The breakthrough for Christians is the recognition that an event which was supposed to signal the last days had happened in Jesus. In Jesus Christ the last days are also the eternal present.