



Third Sunday Easter 2006

Acts 3: 13-19. 1John 2:1-5 Luke 24: 35-48.

Today it's hard to choose which reading to focus on. Acts gives us the wonderful story of the cure at the Beautiful Gate while Luke tells of the appearance of Jesus to the eleven. The stories of Resurrection are complex so perhaps it may be useful to look at what the early communities experienced and what they came to understand as Resurrection.

Jesus died. The early church had to counter stories that Jesus had not really died but had just had a mystical transformation. This was declared heresy. Jesus' death by violence was to be accepted as part of history. As for all of us, death was the ending of his physical existence.

For John, Jesus is glorified in his death, the hour of the Cross is the hour of resurrection. Luke sees resurrection as the fulfilment of the Cross. Death and resurrection are seen as two sides of the same event. This describes a transition of a human being's life with God from its historical and ever developing phase to its final, mature form in which the human being is totally caught up in God, at one with the presence and life of God forever.

We know that our attempts to interpret the Gospel accounts of Jesus' appearances have often led us to see Jesus as resuming his life in this world, but the accounts are at pains to show us that Jesus was experienced in a totally new way.

The focus for the early Christians was on God. Resurrection is an action of God. God raised Jesus.

Jesus was seen as embodying the establishment of the reign of God. Resurrection was Jesus' confirmation by God as Messiah. St. Paul who was first to write about the resurrection concluded that Jesus' glorified body could not be described. He used the image of the seed. What is planted is one thing what emerges from the soil is totally different in appearance.

We could easily think that the evangelists with their appearance stories were describing a different experience. Mention of Jesus' wounds or of Jesus eating could easily be read literally, but the writers deliberately portray the risen Christ as different and not easily recognised.

What do we learn from the stories?

Jesus is alive and present to the world as God is.

Jesus is God in the flesh.

The disciples recognised Jesus in their own transformation.

They discovered that the energy of God's life flowed in their veins.

They experienced this gift as salvation.

The stories describe a gradual transformation in the disciples.

This transformation was experienced with a joy which enabled them to proclaim the good news to all.

The story of Peter's and John's encounter with the cripple at the Beautiful Gate is resurrection revealed in action.

The resurrection is also the event through which God pours forth the earth-shaking force which is the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of the Lord fills the earth enabling people of faith to radiate God's life, love, healing and liberation to all.

It was the proclamation of the risen Lord or the testimony of believers which was the key factor in belief.

In the creed we proclaim our belief in the resurrection of the body.

What do we mean?

First, although we speak easily about body and soul, we are a single entity. We are who we are, through our bodies. We believe that our transformation will be total.

While our historical situation will change we will retain our identity in continuity, in a unique and personal way. We will preserve this never-ending continuity with our historical existence in our presence to God and others in a dynamic communion which will be a full participation in the reign of God.

Just as over our lifetime our physical matter has changed without our loss of identity, so in the ultimate change our identity will not be lost.

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