

## Easter Day 2023

Think of a really good party that you went to. What were you celebrating? A birthday party? Perhaps you had Christmas drinks. Perhaps the best party you went to was a wedding party — your wedding, a friend's wedding, your child's wedding. Or perhaps that party was simply to celebrate the joy of being alive and free?

Parties celebrate three things: life, relationships and freedom. Birthday parties of course remember that on that day *this* person was born — and we love them so much! Christmas parties — well that's remembering Jesus's birthday. Weddings celebrate not new life, but life made new by the cementing of the loving couple's relationship. At the end of the second world war there were street parties everywhere — Freedom! Freedom from the fear and pain of war! Victory over evil and death!

On Easter Day we are celebrating for every single one of these reasons! We should really party!

1. So, despite the eggs, chicks and bunnies everywhere we are celebrating more than new life, but *renewed* life. The love of God the Father was so complete, his power so great that he must breathe new life back into his crucified son —hauling him from death to life, exonerating him of all accusations made against him, restoring him to us, and restoring and making new our relationship with him and with the Father!
2. Like a wedding — this is a celebration of relationship, a declaration of relationship! — For God so loved the world that he gave (back) his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have the life of the ages!
3. And this is a victory celebration! Christ has conquered death, he has overcome evil, and the gates of hell could not prevail against him! Freedom!!

I found a statement of faith that put it this way: "God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ, is a mystery which the Scriptures describe in various ways. It is called the sacrifice of a lamb, a shepherd's life given for his sheep, atonement by a priest; again it is ransom of a slave, payment of debt, vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, and victory over the powers of evil. *These are expressions of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory in the depths of God's love for humankind. They reveal the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of God's reconciling work.*"

I think this is a very powerful description of what we're dealing with here. God's reconciling cannot sufficiently be describe by one theory, and it solves many things. But **reconciliation** is absolutely at the heart of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and in the heart of God.

This love is found in Jesus's compassion. In Christ God suffered all the pain of a cruel and cynical mis-trial and barbaric death. Whatever pain we have, we know God understands this. Suffering so, we know that Jesus's words of absolution — "Father forgive them, they know not what they do" — are given in the reality of pain, and are not glib nor superficial.

We have this absolution spoken by Jesus, and in the resurrection we have God's affirmation of that forgiveness. For any relationship to flourish there must not be unfinished business: there must be grace. Often we don't know what we did wrong until we have been forgiven it. In the resurrection we find that God really forgives, and responding to that, we recognise our sins. But God's forgiveness always comes first, and always outstrips our repentance. God is the Father with arms outstretched, running to embrace his returning prodigals.

The resurrection means more than this though: It means Trust! If the resurrection really happened and Jesus is alive (and my Fisherman article argues why we can trust it did) we *know* who is in charge. And we *know* he is good! We are freed from all the weight of anxiety that the world carries — because whatever the trials and struggles of life we have a very good, very loving, very powerful ally, and we know that all will be well in the end, because God is Good.

And we are so assured of God's love in the resurrection. Song of Songs chapter 8 contains this line: 'for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love...' Love won't let anything get in the way of that love. It won't brook separation. If God's love is as strong as death, it means that even death cannot separate us from God's love — and that means we are assured of life after death, life with God, in the new heaven and new earth he promises. Death is not the end.

Today is a party day — renewed life, the sealing of a new relationship with God, and victory over sin and death. Alleluia!

**Amen.**