

He is Risen

Acts 10.34-43

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

1 Corinthians 15.1-11

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas,^[b] and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Mark 16.1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.^[a]

Broken relationships can be really painful. No matter how that relationship was broken, when they end there can be bruised feelings, resentment, anger, bewilderment, emptiness. The story of holy week, of Good Friday and Easter Sunday is the story of a broken relationship and its restoration — or perhaps just the beginning of the restoration.

It's easy for people like me to be over-analytical with the cross and the resurrection. Let me clarify — there is an important place for very deep analysis of the events that are the heart of Christianity, and the three days of Good Friday to Easter Sunday deserve all this depth of theological thought. Doing good theology is a deep form of worship. But... we also need to step back and look at the story. What is the story?

The big story is of a broken relationship between God and mankind. A dramatic relationship breakdown, not simply between those who never knew their creator, but even between those who thought they knew their God, and who thought they were doing the right thing. Relationships break down when we don't even understand each other anymore, and we scramble around, trying to do the right thing, and it only makes it worse... That had been going on for some time.

We sometimes talk of sin being a barrier between God's perfection and our humanity. We say God is so good that he cannot tolerate our sin. But I think ideas like that are symptoms of the breakdown and the misunderstanding, because I look at the Christmas story and see a God so eager to restore his relationship with mankind that he becomes a man — fully man, but still fully God — and he lives among us. This is not the story of a God who is allergic to sin, sealing himself off from contagion. Rather **this is the story of God** the doctor, who comes to the patients despite the danger. And it is **the story of mankind** who has tended to say that the distance must be God's fault and not our own — because we don't even understand any more. So Jesus lives this life and shares bread with us and walks our road, and he talks and talks, and loves and heals and lets himself be known. And some people follow him and discover that they *do* know him, and they figure out that he *is* God....

But it doesn't seem to be enough, because most of the others take one look at him, and say 'he can't be God!' He's lying! He's full of himself! He's evil! He's trying to break everything we had! And those people killed him, and were sure that they were doing the right thing. They were sure that God approved of their actions.

And then the resurrection happened. God rolled the stone away and Jesus rose from the dead, and met with Mary Magdalene, and the disciples and more after that. God wasn't done with mankind. Jesus wasn't done with mankind. The resurrection might be seen as proof that God wasn't done with us yet. God still loved us, still wanted relationship with us, still wanted us to be with him.

The resurrection was the necessary moment by which Jesus's disciples and then other followers — the early church — and eventually you and me, were convinced that this was God, that Jesus had made himself known to us, that he forgave us, that he still wants us to be friends. It may not sound like much when I say it's about relationship, but really everything that is most important in your life and mine is about relationship, and this was the most important moment in all history.

I said that this was the moment of restoring the relationship between God and mankind — or the beginning of that restoration. And here's what I mean. If a girl says, 'I still love you', and a

boy says, 'yeah, sorry,' there is still some way to go before that relationship is great again. And by the same token, if Jesus rises from the dead and says, 'I, who am God, still love you,' and some of say, 'I'm sorry I walked away from you, I'm sorry I wanted you dead,' there is still some way for us to go. And you know as well as I that from this point it is *we* who have to put the work in, to make that relationship whole (though even there, the Holy Spirit works with us to help us bridge a gap that would be more than we could handle).

An Old Testament prophet called Micah summarised very well what our job is now. He said: 'And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'

Three things to guide us in our response to the resurrection and the love of God. Firstly — to act justly. We must live in a way that seeks to do no harm to others, that is honest and gentle and respectful of all people, and does not seek vengeance and doesn't talk badly about other people. We must act justly.

Secondly — to love mercy. If the crown 2000 years ago had loved mercy more, they might not have demanded Jesus's crucifixion. They would have avoided the terrible injustice that followed from their great keenness *for* Justice. Jesus, in the resurrection, loved mercy. He did not condemn but forgave. He did not beat down Pontius Pilate's door but let it go — even that! We are to love mercy, to ditch our grudges, to under-react. The world is more peaceful this way. The world is better and we are better this way.

Thirdly, we are to walk humbly with our God. You know how things far away from us seem smaller and smaller until they disappear? That's how it can be with us — things that are far from us seem of no importance, while what is closest to us — ourselves — seems the most important thing of all. God sees it differently. He sees things the size they really are, and we, in our humility need to learn to see things his way, and see things the way others see them. To walk a mile in the other person's shoes, as the saying goes. This is something we can practice and get better at, but then must still continue to practice, or we grow rusty, and the skill dies.

Easter is the story of a broken relationship between mankind and God, which God came to fix, and calls us to work in fixing. If we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly, as Jesus did, we may fix a lot more than our relationship with God — and we will discover much more of the awesomeness of God's love for us.

May I wish you a very very joyful Easter.

Amen.