

13 February 2022 St Brandon's 10:15am

1 Cor 15: 12-20 Luke 6:17-26

Resurrection

Have you bought any Easter eggs? I know we're not even in Lent yet, but Lent seems not to feature in the marketing plans of our supermarkets.

Nor, by the way, will the Real Easter Egg in 2022 - those lovely eggs we delivered in last year's lockdown to all the local children, containing an illustrated book of the first Easter and made from fair trade chocolate, with no plastic wrappings. Advert over, except to say that if enough of us want to order one (or more) we can send off for a case for church and help spread the word.

Whereas our shops feature eggs for months before Easter, here in church we will rightly spend these weeks considering Christ's journey to the cross: perhaps longer than spend considering his resurrection. Or maybe that's my perspective as a vicar, who habitually takes a holiday on the Sunday after Easter! But, we can read the resurrection accounts in the gospels simply as the glorious happy ending of the story of Jesus' earthly life, without digging into what resurrection means, the lynchpin of the gospel and of our faith.

How good then, that in today's epistle, Paul lays out the argument for resurrection to the Corinthians, many of whom may have been in agreement with their fellow Greeks, that bodily resurrection could not happen. Many tended towards the body- soul dualism of Platonist philosophy, in which the soul was highly valued and immortal but the body seen as a disposable and worthless incumbrance. That's a view which is not uncommon today, and it's easy, when affirming our belief in life after death, to end up colluding with this – to speak about the immortality of the soul, but not the resurrection of the body. Jesus' incarnation reminds us that body and soul *both* matter, that we

are creatures, physical beings, made in the image of God. Christ entered fully, physically and spiritually, into our humanity when he came to earth.

Let's look at what Paul says. Do have your readings sheet in front of you to help you follow for the next few minutes.

In the first half of Chapter 15, we read Paul's great statement of the good news he has taught them, faithfully passed down to him and by him – it's an early form of creed. He lists all the people who saw the risen Jesus, the witnesses in this logical and pseudo-legal argument, though Paul's aim here is not just to prove that Jesus rose, but to prove why it matters. And so to today's passage and the first of seven 'ifs' with which Paul challenges and confronts them. First, the overarching provocative question.

***If** Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can you say there is no resurrection?*

Just suppose you're right, what does that mean...and here come 6 more **ifs**. **If** you're right, says Paul, then my life's work and your faith are both 'in vain', a waste of time, useless.

Jesus' resurrection is indisputable to Paul because so many people saw him, spoke with him, touched the nail marks in his hands... When you say there is no resurrection, you deny that Christ rose, which is not an option for the Christian, says Paul, as he lays out three compelling reasons.

Number 1. **If** the resurrection did not happen, then, says Paul, I have been misrepresenting God and my whole testimony is invalidated. I've built a house of cards and removed the first card, so that the whole lot crumbles. When you don't believe in resurrection, says Paul, you can't believe anything: you can't pick and choose which parts of the gospel to believe.

Reason Number 2. **If** Christ has not been raised, then your faith is in vain and you are still 'in your sins'. The phrase 'in vain', repeated in English, is two different words in Greek: *kenon*- empty and *mataia* – fruitless. Together they convey disappointment, disillusion and despair; shrivelling of future hope; a betrayal of what has been promised.

Furthermore, the consequence is that, without Christ's death *and* resurrection, the atonement for our sins *and* the defeat of death, what difference does our faith make?

The resurrection is the indisputable proof that Christ is victorious, the gospel is true, God's power and grace can transform lives and bring new life, in this world and the next.

So to Reason Number 3 and more **ifs** from Paul as he develops his argument.

If resurrection is not true, then no one has hope, none of our loved ones will rise, we will never meet again, this life is all there is and we Christians are 'of all people most to be pitied'. That's a popular view today, that Christians are sad and deluded.

How important then, that our lives are our witness, that what we say and how we live both proclaim that Christ is risen. Paul knows the Corinthians have been sustained and comforted by their hope in Christ, as we are today, the deep hope which can change disappointment into energy, disillusion into clearer vision and despair into new life, But **if** there's no resurrection, all that hope vanishes.

If there's no resurrection, if Christ has not been raised, if it is true that the dead are not raised; if the dead are not raised; if for this life only we have hoped in Christ... if, if, if...

Paul's argument is made, the picture painted, the good news reversed...

It's a scene of life ruled by slander, hypocrisy, deception, dishonesty. Bleak indeed. All too familiar, perhaps?

Seven **ifs** in these verses, then three words to counter them: **But in fact** **But in fact** Christ has been raised. *This* is how it is, this is the solid ground, the cornerstone, the eternal truth. The resurrection is the fulfilment of all that has Scripture promised, and Christ's resurrection is the 'first fruits'. Just as the first sheaf of grain was brought as an offering to the temple, the pledge and proof of the harvest to come, so Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of the resurrection that will take place when Christ returns as judge and king, when God's kingdom comes in power and glory, for ever and ever. **Amen!**

In the midst of the slander, hypocrisy, deception, dishonesty of our times, let us both proclaim and live the truth of Christ's resurrection.

But in fact Christ has been raised

This truth is the foundation for our lives, the fact which frames our worldview and the hope which sustains and motivates us to share the good news of Christ.

*Alleluia! Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!***

like someone claiming that you can't walk on the moon when they've actually met Buzz Aldrin or Neil Armstrong.