

## **SERMON: Sunday – 19 March 2023 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **Anastasis and Zoe**

Job 28:1-20  
John 11:17-35

I thought I'd try to be clever and call this sermon, Anastasis and Zoe, the two Greek words for resurrection and life.

Thinking this was a unique new discovery, I was a bit surprised to see that at least one person has beaten me to it. Indeed there is a video online of a Nigerian preacher gi'in' it la'ldy with loud repetition of the two words.

And some of you might also know that there's even an actor called Zoe Anastasis. In fact some of you might even know someone called Anastasis or Anastasia and probably everyone knows a Zoe.

But maybe you never knew the meaning of the words before?

(SLIDE)

In John 11 after the death of his good friend Lazarus, Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection (anastasis) and the life (zoe). The one who believes in me (even though he dies) will live (Zoe).

Anastasis means a standing up, a raising up, a rising up again. Its the sort of word that lifts your spirit just like the fans on the terraces of Murrayfield when the crowds rise up to sing together the Flower of Scotland, with the heart stirring words, "But we can still rise now, And be a nation again".

I'm not sure that's what Jesus had in mind when he made this statement in to his dear friend Martha, in need of consolation at the death of her brother.

He did certainly mean it as a rising up from the dead and not just like someone standing up. The context is clear. It's about someone who has died living again.

But even in the singing together of stirring songs there IS something divine about rising up in resurrection. Something we humans are very much attracted to. Something that is 'in God'. Something mysterious. Something that we ken to be beyond our ken whilst at the same time being something that is within our desire. We know it's beyond us but we desire it none the less.

If we look around us outside, we see signs of resurrection at this time of year when the Spring air yields new growth from the apparent dead of mid winter. Dead looking sticker suddenly have buds on them. Snow drops and affodils and tulips poke their heads out through the ground. Insects appear from no where. Nature has so much to teach us about resurrection and about the God behind it all.

This is not to belittle death because experiencing the death, especially of a loved one, is probably the most traumatic thing any of us will ever face.

It was the death of one of his children that turned someone I know away from organised religion. Such a tragedy to lose a child. But even though his faith died in some way, it was never completely dead and lost. It was changed.

Years later this lover of the outdoors was quoted as saying he'd rather be walking on a hill top thinking about God than in a church building longing to be walking in the hills.

And I was struck at how wise that was. God is in everything God created. And God can be found in everything God created.

We all have times when our faith seems dry and maybe what is happening is a kind of death awaiting resurrection.

I was reading this week about Saint Teresa of Avila and about how there were many times in her life when her faith was tested or that she just felt far from God or anything Divine.

(SLIDE)

For example, when we have trouble praying, Teresa recommends that we turn to nature. She says, "Go to some place where you can see the sky, and walk up and down a little."

Her rationale was that since God is infinite and everywhere, sometimes we rejoice as much in meditating as part of creation as in meditating on the Divine. Why limit ourselves to only one of creation's mysteries when there are so many? Teresa mentions the mystery of water, the sparrow-hawk, and the tiny ant. Any of these, she said, is enough for a whole period of prayer, immersing us in the wonder and wisdom of God.

I like that idea that we can glean something of the Wisdom of God by meditating on one of God's creatures.

How wise of God to make an ant. And look how it works. And together, a whole army working and moving in unison. How awesome and wise in the way they are together.

Not that I'm saying that Teresa is encouraging the worshipping of creation rather than the Creator. I think what she means is that the contemplation and meditation will reveal the Creator behind it all. Creation helps us to feel immersed in the wonder and the wisdom of the God who made it all.

The reading from Job is a poem by a poet in awe of the works of creation and the Wise Maker who is to be found through it.

But where can wisdom be found?      Where does understanding dwell?  
No mortal comprehends its worth;      it cannot be found in the land of the  
living.

Is Wisdom then to be found through death? Is God to be discovered as the  
God who dies and rises again?

"I am the resurrection and the life (said Jesus to Martha). The one who  
believes in me will live, even though they die".

I am Anastasis and Zoe. Resurrection and Life. Whoever lives by believing in  
me will never die, even though they do.

Though we didn't read the end of the Lazarus story beyond verse 35, the point  
act which Jesus wept, we know how the story ended. We know that when  
Jesus gave the word, Lazarus was raised from the dead.

Even although Jesus arrived at the tomb four days after the internment  
and with a stone sealing the entrance. Martha can't believe that Jesus is  
asking for the stone to be taken away for the smell will be awful.

To which Jesus challenges her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will  
see the glory of God?"

Our faith is left to us to believe or not. Are we going to take God at his word or  
not? Will we believe what Jesus has said or will we forget about it?

To believe that God can raise someone from the dead means that God can do  
anything. It changes our world view of all things.

If we put ourselves in Jesus shoes, walk in his way then with God anything is  
possible.

Climate change can be fixed. Poverty and hunger can be  
eradicated. Disease and illness can be healed. Wars can end and peace can  
reign. Disagreements can be settled. People can learn to live together in  
harmony and learn to love one another.

True spiritual encounter changes our politics, our attitude toward money, our use of time, our relationships toward foreigners and the weak, our attitude toward war and nationalism because we know ourselves to be citizens of God's Big Kingdom now (see Philippians 3:20).

And we must be prepared to have a very different lifestyle as a result of encountering God and want to spend all our time on the one thing necessary, which is to grow deeper and deeper in love every chance that we get.

It's all about love. It's all about union.

Let me finish with one final thought as I want to keep this sermon short since we will be having our ASM after this.

It's later in John 11, in verse 52 that it is the high priest Caiaphas, of all people, who underlines the purpose of Jesus death. He answers the question of why did Jesus have to die, with the words, "his death is for the gathering together of all the children of God".

That's what Anastasis and Zoe are for. That's what resurrection and Life means - to bring together - the Greek word is synagogue - to bring together all people in God.

It's all about love. It's all about union.

So what might we do this week as we seek the God of Anastasis and Zoe, the God who raises up from the dead and brings life; the God who, to paraphrase Teresa, raises us up to love and guides us to do whatever best awakens love?

Let's pray.

O Lord

Every encounter with you changes us

Make us unafraid to seek you

And be changed by you

So that we might see resurrection and life

Breaking out from the darkness of decay and death.

In Jesus name.

Amen.