

**SERMON: Easter Sunday 21 April 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

**“The Resurrection and the Longing for More”  
(1 Corinthians 15:19-26 and John 20:1-18)**

The universe is full of death and resurrection.

Life dies in Winter. Life springs forth in Spring.

In every minute, 300 million cells in the human body die and new cells are formed.

In the universe, death and resurrection is a doorway into a new beginning.

All things begin with Christ, continue with Christ and are made complete in Christ.

The essence of the Good News is the bringing together of all things in Christ.

I love the Easter story. I love how it's Mary Magdalene who is blessed with being the first person to encounter the Risen Jesus. But do you not think it's a strange message that Jesus gives her?

(Don't cling to me but) “Go instead to my brothers and tell them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”” (John 20:17).

Apart from the obvious good news in affirming to Mary that we all share the same Father and the same God, why did he want to tell the brothers that he was going up to the Father? (Something which he didn't do until 40 days later, by the way).

Would you not expect him to simply say something like, go tell the brothers (and sisters) that I'm alive, I'm not dead?

Turn to your neighbour and ask them, why do you think Jesus made a point in saying “I am ascending”.

Clearly, he was different. The Risen Jesus was in a different state. Some say he was in a glorified state. But we know he could still touch and be touched, and he could still speak and talk and walk and eat. Did he need to sleep though? Did he still hunger and thirst?

I don't know but somehow I don't think he did.

The Risen Christ has given us something to long for. He's given us a longing and a hope for life to be more full, more complete, more wholesome, more loving, more full of peace, kindness.

And I think this longing and hoping is a beautiful thing for us because our hope is rooted in the certainty of the resurrection and the coming of heaven.

The resurrection of Christ gives us a passion to see what's possible. This is why the Risen Jesus talks in heavenly terms, about belonging above. He came from the state of heaven and the kingdom of God was the mission he kick started.

And death and resurrection are key marks of that kingdom that we are now invited to embrace.

Like Jesus, we too are to turn our thoughts heavenward in order to play our part in making the earth more heavenly, under the headship and reign of Christ.

As Paul says, "now the resurrection from the dead has begun through ... Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:21).

The resurrection from the dead means that atmospheres can be changed.

Me and my family had a wee foretaste of this when every summer for many years we went to Clan Gathering - Christians Linked Across the Nation - and the atmosphere on the campsite was always one of warmth (despite the weather) and people looking out for one another and dwelling in harmony. It wasn't until you left the site and went into the town centre that we were reminded of the humanity wasn't yet perfect and the kingdom of God was still to reach many people.

But the foretaste is good and we can make it spread though our own networks - longing and hoping for the Spirit of Christ to work with us in changing atmospheres in our families, our workplaces and the homes and streets of our villages.

You can see why the church, the body of the Risen Christ, is God's idea for raising atmospheres to a new level.

We're involved in nothing less than the making of the new heavens and the new earth that the prophet Isaiah spoke about, where Jerusalem is created to be a delight and its people a joy, where infants will no longer die young or old men don't live out their years, where there is equality and justice, where people will no longer labour in vain or build houses they could never afford to live in, where the wolf and the lamb will feed together and nothing will cause harm or be destroyed (Isaiah 65:17-25).

So let's rejoice in the Easter resurrection and let's expect atmospheres to be raised up as we know ourselves in Christ together, as both a future glory, but also beginning now as a present reality.