

SERMON: 28 April 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper

**“The Quiet Resurrection of Unfailing Love”
(Acts 5:27-32 and John 20:19-31)**

The Easter message is Christ is Risen. But what does it mean?

Does it mean that the man Jesus simply got up, pushed back the stone with angelic help and walked out, showing us that death is not the end?

I think it was more than that.

Jesus getting up and walking out would simply be resuscitation. Resurrection is so much more.

The Risen Christ is more than a man who was once dead is now alive. The Risen Christ is the transfigured body of the man Jesus exploded outwards in glorious light, beyond time and space, so that it touches all life. [SLIDE]

But I hear some of us thinking, the Risen Jesus was still a man.

And that's true. He was still in a recognisable form because his friends knew him as the man they'd known.

So, does the resurrection mean human beings are no longer subject to death?

No. On the contrary, death is a key moment of transformation into the resurrected life. And perhaps we won't see the fullness of what resurrection is until after our own bodies die and we make that final journey.

As Paul puts it, the last enemy to be defeated is death itself.

I was reminded this week of the funeral liturgy that says that life does not end with death, but is merely changed by it.

So, at death, there's a point of transition from one form of life to another form of life.

Christians believe the foretaste of this is when one becomes a new creation, the old man has died and the new lives. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me says Paul.

The new form of life is Christ life, thanks to the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, whose Risen Life has now exploded outwards from the empty tomb, to transfigure human life without the constraints of time and space.

So do we have to wait until our bodies die in order to experience resurrection life?

Yes and no.

Remember last week we thought about how every minute some 300 million cells in our bodies die and are replaced with new cells. Here's another statistic I came across this week. 98% of our bodies' atoms are replaced every year.

So it's true we are new creations, literally.

Say to yourself, 'I'm not the same person I was this time last year'. Turn to your neighbour and say it. And then tell them back, 'No, you're not the same person you were last year. You're a new creation'.

Now it takes a strange awesome power to transfigure life. What sort of power could take these quivering, frightened friends of Jesus, hiding behind locked doors for fear of their lives, and change them into apostles of the good news? What awesome power would be needed to make them bold and strong in faith?

The answer, of course, is the power of resurrection which was unleashed on that first Easter and handed to humans on a plate through the Risen Christ breathing on his disciples and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The Risen Jesus breathing on his disciples, reminds us of Aslan breathing life into the frozen statues of Narnia or God breathing his Spirit into the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision.

But clearly, it's not all about explosions and fireworks and making a big show of things, because the resurrecting power of God seems to prefer to work quietly and subversively. Hence, a quiet resurrection is taking place, one of love, which, because love is unfailing, will win in the end, because it is inspiring an army of ordinary people to trust in the resurrection.

The post resurrection story of the Risen Jesus and Thomas shows us that the Risen Jesus still bore the marks of the crucifixion on his body. He carried the signs of the pains of the world. He carried them through death into life. He was a mixture of both wounded and resurrected at the same time.

All of us are a mixture of woundedness and resurrection. Henri Nouwen used the term wounded healer to describe Jesus and wounded healers to describe those in Christ. Like the Risen Jesus, we carry with us, marks of pain as well as signs of risen life.

Christ is a mixture of great love and great suffering. So, to be 'in Christ' is to be the same. And to trust that somehow God uses this mixture to transform us (or resurrect us in newness), in order to bring blessing to us and to those around us.

I love the song, 'My King has got scars on his hands', because it tells me what the Bible says about God being acquainted with grief and suffering, and he doesn't project it onto others but instead carries it home.

And for me, this is significant because, I think we too are called to carry things home. I'm thinking of the wounds and pains, some self inflicted, some inflicted by others, some inflicted onto others, that will only be dealt with as we choose to entrust them to God alone rather than blame others for them or project our pains onto someone else.

This week's Acts reading tells us that Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious leaders, were jealous of the apostles teaching in Jesus' name. No doubt they were jealous of the crowds queuing up to be healed, even to walk in Peter's shadow and be healed, but they were also jealous of their teaching. And what was that teaching but to love enemies, refuse violence, seek peace and entrust all things to God.

We saw last week how important it is to stand up and speak out against violence when the priest at the funeral of Lyra McKee asked the question, 'why in God's name, does it take the death of a 29 year old to get us to this point?'.

It was heartening to hear that there is a new generation of young people growing up in Ireland who are refusing to be enemies or take guns in their hands. Their hope is that Lyra's death will birth a new life in the land, new life from death.

Likewise, the apostles were up against jealousy and the rest. It would have been tempting to fight back in their own strength rather than rely on the power of the God who will have the last word on all matters.

I'm not saying we shouldn't share our burdens because I think in the body of Christ we MUST do that. And there will be cases where outside counselling will be necessary. But we can do it without attaching blame or projecting pain.

Our model is Christ, just as our whole life is in Christ. So, we look to Jesus and see how to carry pain and suffering and difficulty, and trust the saving work of Christ now in us, to transform us, reconcile us and bring newness.

The risen power of Christ is with us to make this possible. So don't be afraid of death and dying but embrace it as the way to new life.

With God's help, as we keep on practising the way of Jesus, we will see the risen life of Christ coming, more and more often into more and more people, in Kirknewton and East Calder and beyond. There is a quiet resurrection of unending love happening all around.