

**“Entering the Mystery of Resurrection”**

**(Luke 24.36-43)**

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**Introduction**

Easter Sunday is a happy day... a day of celebration. And we give it our best shot – we dress our churches, we wear our best clothes and get out our best plate... and we respond with a vigour rarely seen in decorous Anglican liturgy.

“*Christ is risen*” the priest says... and we shout in reply, “*He is risen indeed, Alleluia!*”

As a Church, we commonly speak of Easter JOY.

If heard uncritically, it sounds like a magical moment of transformation... where we’re lifted from our usual experience of human struggle... and transported in an instant to the transcendent experience of joy.

I understand this theologically... After all, *Christ is risen*... *Life has triumphed over death*.

And yet...

And yet... do I *really* know that experience of resurrection joy in my life? Is that *really* where I am?

**Resurrection Appearances**

These resurrection stories that we gather around in the first Sundays of the Easter season, are strange, confused, narratives.

Rowan Williams says, it’s their very messiness that convinces him the bodily resurrection of Christ Jesus is true. If you were concocting/fabricating a lie, you’d make sure these appearance narratives were coherent, ordered and certain... But these stories are anything but!

They smell of a community in confusion... people finding themselves tossed about in an experience they don’t understand... something that they can’t order or contain, because it is beyond their existing comprehension. It’s messy!

Today’s story from *Luke’s Gospel* is typical...

Yes, there is joy... later in the piece... but that's not where it begins.

When Jesus first appears, the response of the disciples is *fear*.

*"They were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost."* (37)

(Flick through the resurrection narratives and you'll see that *fear* is a common first response.)

In today's text, Jesus asks them, *"Why are you frightened?"*

Well, that's **easy** to answer...

- *First of all... you're dead. We saw you dead.*
- *Secondly, you've just appeared somehow... and the doors are locked and the walls are stone.*
- *Thirdly... WHO are you... and WHAT are you?* (It's another common feature of these stories. The Risen Christ is not instantly recognizable as the Jesus they once knew. Clearly there's something 'different' about him, hence having to show them his wounded hands and feet.)
- *Fourthly... what in the hell is happening here?*

Of course they're afraid! This is an experience beyond anything they've ever known. It's total mystery – they have no frame of previous reference to guide or inform them here.

Resurrection is not... *'Good old Jesus is back, and now we can go back to how it was in the happy times. Now we can go back to our old dreams, our old agendas – we can put Jesus on the throne of Israel, and then we disciples can take our rightful place as the 'important men' in the new kingdom. Happy times... just like we want it to be.'*

No, it's not like that... and they know it.

It's something else...

And what it is, is not at all clear.

Where is this going?

To relate to this new Risen Jesus is to enter a new world... an open-ended relationship that could take them anywhere.

*Fear* is the first response... (and fair enough).

*Joy* comes much later.

***Finding Ourselves Where We Are***

It was the Third Sunday of Easter about 20 years ago... I came back to my chair after preaching... on the resurrection... and in the silence, God-given insight came to me.

I'd tried my best, but in truth I had no idea what Resurrection was.

I'd always assumed that it would be a perfected version of the life, the self, I already knew. That somehow God would magically renovate the untidiness of my life... And all my hopes, dreams and aspirations would come true, in a flow of unending perfection, achievement and joy.

It would my existing world made perfect...

But in that moment, I saw for the first time, that resurrection was an invitation to a life I didn't know... beyond my experience... even beyond my conception. To open myself to resurrection, would mean abandoning the old self with all its dreams and agendas... *and* all its supposed knowledge and wisdom... in the hope that GOD would make something *new* of me.

So, I get Easter JOY intellectually... and occasionally I taste hints and whispers of that blessed state. They *do* come!

But I know that I'm not *living there*... not experientially. I'm still back somewhere in Holy Week, in that very human struggle that leads to the cross.

In our life of faith, we come to a point, where we feel caught between an old life that we no longer believe in, a life that no longer works for us, and *this* invitation to Life (Resurrection), that is bigger than anything we've ever known, enticing but frightening, in its utter mystery.

(REPEAT)

As with the disciples in this morning's Gospel, do we run away or accept and embrace our fear, allowing Christ to call us into mystery.

*"Touch me and see."*

### ***Entering the Mystery***

This is of course, the work of GOD in us, but what disposition can we adopt and practise, if we would truly know resurrection in our lives? How do we say YES to this invitation before us today?

The most helpful metaphor (to me) is that it's like leaving an old land to explore, to journey-in, a land I've never been before.

I am attracted by the stories and reports I've heard from other travellers, but nonetheless it is scary to leave the old land that I know so well.

And when you're travelling in an unfamiliar world, you can't rely on what you already know.

Indeed, when it comes to the world of resurrection, much of what previously passed as knowledge, certainty, common sense, even 'wisdom', is now revealed as useless. It can't help anymore. It doesn't actually take you anywhere.

We need to learn to walk the way of *un-knowing*... The new wisdom lies in *not-knowing*.

One should expect a degree of disorientation... indeed such confusion is both inevitable and necessary, in leaving the old modes of perception and understanding behind.

(Switching metaphors)... exploring resurrection is about cultivating the open and empty space.

As the Dean said last week, it is about embracing the mystery of the *open and empty* tomb, rather than holding-on to the supposed security of the *closed and locked doors* in the upper room.

Open space in which the Risen Christ can appear.

Our thought should be empty... waiting... not seeking anything in particular, but open and ready to receive. Not knowing where things are leading, and allowing where we end-up to be a surprise discovery, as opposed to something predetermined.

Radical patience is required, for the Resurrection has depths and facets that will only be revealed to us over time. Once again... we're waiting.

## **Conclusion**

As we mature in faith, we come... (repeatedly... not just once)... we come to a point, where we feel caught between an old life that we no longer believe in, a life that no longer works for us, and *this* invitation to Life (Resurrection), that is bigger than anything we've ever known, enticing but frightening, in its utter mystery.

It is frightening to leave behind what we've always known... that old land of supposed certainty. And today's sermon may sound 'way-too-hard'... but for three things...

1. Exploration is exciting! (Bring it on! What else would you want to do with your life?)
2. And we are led by a guide who knows the way. In the tradition we call Christ Jesus the *Pioneer* of our faith, for he has walked this path before us, and it is his desire and delight to reveal it to us. Christ is calling us... speaking to us... "*Come touch me and see.*" If we turned-

off the interminable babble of our own egoic self, we would be surprised what we can hear from his mouth.

3. And... although I don't *feel* as though I know the experience of resurrection life, the resurrection has already happened in me. For it is GOD's gift to me... to us. Nothing needs to be achieved, for it is already here. Simply, all we need do is wake up and realise. Resurrection is reality. The old life with all its suffering and struggle is illusion. We wake up to JOY.