

Sunday 14th May 2023; Easter 6; Benefice HC Ampleforth

Some words that become very familiar with us during the Easter season are, “Alleluia, He is Risen”

We proclaim these words as the fundamental, central, and unique identifier of the Christian faith. It is corporate and personal and the conviction with which we say and believe the words comes from what I was talking about last week, of knowing the ‘Truth’ because of the transforming gift of the anointing of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds. Jesus again in our Gospel today tells his disciples and reminds us that this ‘Spirit of Truth’ abides in us and is given to us if we love Him as our Lord and Saviour and demonstrate that to the world in changed lives, following his commandments to love and care for all people, especially one another.

In the book of Acts today, we find St Paul attempting to proclaim this same truth. He is in uncharted territory. Athens is the first Greek city he has been to, and he is unprepared for the overwhelming number of idols that fill the city. He splits his time between the synagogue—filled with Jews as well as Gentiles who worship the Jewish God—and the marketplace, where the Athenian philosophers find him and as the Greeks love to talk about new religions, they invite him to speak. He states how the religious culture of Athens, and their own poets point to the Creator-God of the Jews. He calls them to repentance to restore their relationship with God and introduces them to the mediator, Jesus. The philosophers follow with interest until he asserts something they cannot accept that God raised the mediator from the dead. The concept of resurrection is too much for them. A few do accept Paul's message. The others have the courtesy to just mock him—not stone, beat, or imprison him. By referring to Jesus’ resurrection and implying that all people will likewise be raised from the dead, Paul steers the Athenians toward a notion of communing with the Divine that does not square with their philosophy. To a crowd interested in the immortality only of the soul and a contempt for physical bodies,

Paul preaches about a God who resurrects bodies. It's a difficult thing for the Athenians to hear as good news. Why would people want to keep their bodies they ask. In the end, Paul cannot preach the gospel without referring to the Resurrection of Jesus and roots the significance of this event in humanity's yearning for salvation and knowledge of God's forgiveness. Jesus fits within basic Greek religious ideas, but he also confounds them. He brings something new, something unfamiliar, something that is the Truth.

This passage also characterizes the Christian faith as a faith about resurrection. Paul takes his audience's context seriously, but he also tells these people something that blows their minds; something surprising, something potentially distasteful. The resurrected Jesus still has a body—a different kind of body, but nonetheless a body.

'Alleluia, He is Risen' is the message St Paul was giving and Acts 17 bears testimony to this truth the church has known about for 2,000 years. But, it seems, no matter what you do or say, as with the Athenians, some people will just not believe the Gospel. The truth is also a stumbling block, and the heart of the message will always trip some people up if they refuse to open their hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit.

That is why it is tempting to change the message, too, perhaps out of a mistaken desire to be successful, or popular or to not give offense, to be all things to all people, to do what Paul refused to do, leave out the message of Christ's death and Resurrection. Or, to turn the Resurrection into something a little more palatable. It might be to say that "resurrection" is only a vague recollection of the departed Jesus, something that maybe can 'live in your memory', or to say Jesus rose again "in their hearts." as an inspiration.

Or maybe to say that the Resurrection of Jesus was like the natural resurrections we witness every day in nature like trees budding out with new leaves after a winter season in which they looked dead with

Easter as just a springtime with the sprouting of daffodils and tulips after a bleak season of snow and ice.

Others might say that whether Jesus rose again from the dead or not isn't so important, it's being loving that's the key, to live 'a good life' like Gandhi or Mother Teresa. These things have their context, but it is not ok to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus as just one good religious idea among many from many different faith traditions and not make it the be-all or end-all of the Christian faith. Because the be-all and end- all of our faith is the statement, 'Alleluia, He is Risen!'

How then do we communicate the truth of the Resurrection? Do we endeavour in every situation and encounter to bring something of the life it brings to others?

To demonstrate that Jesus Christ is Risen is not just something we say, it is something we should live, in feeding the hungry, in visiting the lonely, in caring for the sick and dying, in loving one another in ways that illustrate the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives, shown in kindness, acceptance, gracious hospitality, celebration, praise and thanksgiving.

We can do this because in the Gospel today we hear the promise from Jesus, the Spirit of Truth who is given to us and is "in us." Understanding that means we can truly live by the words Alleluia He is Risen, and that we are not required to demonstrate how much we can do for God, but what He can do through us.

Alleluia, He is Risen! Thanks be to God. Amen.

.