

EASTER SUNDAY 1 Cor 15:19-26

The Power of the Resurrection

In about 1930 as the reach of Communism was spreading, the Communist leader Bukharin travelled from Moscow to Kiev. His mission was to address a huge assembly. His subject, atheism. For a solid hour he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity, hurling argument and ridicule. At last he was finished satisfied that all that was left were the smoldering ashes of his listeners' faith.

"Are there any questions?" Bukharin demanded. A solitary man arose and asked permission to speak. He mounted the platform and moved close to the Communist leader. The audience was breathlessly silent as the man's eyes ranged over the huge crowd before him. At last he shouted the ancient Orthodox greeting, "CHRIST IS RISEN!" The vast assembly arose as one man and the response came crashing like the sound of an avalanche, "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

The Resurrection is without doubt the central tenet of the Christian faith. As Paul says in 2 Cor 15:14 "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."

We gather here this morning to celebrate this great event! Easter Sunday – the celebration of the Resurrection - brings people to worship like no other time in the Christian year.

Yet if we're not careful, our celebration of the Resurrection can be too shallow.

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth – he was warning them not to be too shallow in their hope in Christ. There were those who were not convinced of the resurrection of the dead. Their problem was that they couldn't see past their present life. They had hope in Christ, but it was more for the 'here and now.' "If only for this life we have hope in Christ," said Paul, "we are to be pitied more than all men." Paul had to encourage them to see past this life, and believe in the resurrection.

We, I think, have the opposite problem. As Christians, more than 2000 years after the event, we believe firmly in the resurrection of the dead. We speak confidently of heaven and life after death. Yet that can be too shallow a belief as well – if all it impinges upon is our life AFTER the here and now.

From the moment the stone was rolled away from the tomb, Jesus Christ became victorious over sin and death. But that victory is not something that waits until we die to be effective. The awesome power that raised Christ from the dead has been unleashed upon this earth in the here and now, through the people of God.

When God raised Jesus from the dead, he was crowned with glory and honour, and placed at God's right hand to rule. But that rule does not wait till the end of time to be exercised. He exercises that rule now – through us.

St Paul tells us that death is the LAST enemy to be destroyed. There is much that needs to be done before that final eventuality. Jesus is reigning NOW. The power of his resurrection is at work in the world now. Christ's task is to reign until all enemies are under his feet. – That is, are totally subject to him.

In ancient times, when one army defeated another army, the King of the defeated army would be pushed to the ground, and the King of the victorious army would put his foot on the neck of the defeated King. Hence the saying putting an enemy “under your feet.”

Jesus has already won the victory over death, but his reign in the here and now involves bringing into subjection to himself, all that evil, all that is broken, all that the evil one has usurped and twisted.

How is he to do that?

Jesus' strategy is to use his people to bring his reign to bear on this world.

I've heard people say things like, “Why doesn't God help the refugees in Syria?” or “Why doesn't God do something about the poverty in the world?” There is nothing closer to God's heart than helping the refugees and the poor - but he has chosen to do it through us. He *partners* with us to make a difference in this world.

It is *our* brief to go out into this broken and hurting world, and work for justice. To spread compassion and healing. And to preach the Good News that Jesus has dealt with the sin that separates us from God, so we can once again be his children.

It seems a daunting task, doesn't it? But remember that when Jesus ascended to heaven, it was with a promise on his lips. The promise of POWER from on high. The promise of the Holy Spirit.

When we were baptised we received our marching orders. When we were filled with the Spirit, we received all the power we need to fulfil the commission Christ has given us. The power that is within us is a mighty power. It is the power that raised Jesus from the dead!

In a cemetery in Hanover, Germany, is a grave on which were placed huge slabs of granite and marble cemented together and fastened with heavy steel clasps. It belongs to a woman who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Yet strangely, she directed in her will that her grave be made so secure that if there were a resurrection, it could not reach her. On the headstone these words were inscribed: "This burial place must never be opened." In time, a seed, covered over by the stones, began to grow. Slowly it pushed its way through the soil and out from beneath them. As the trunk enlarged, the great slabs were gradually shifted so that the steel clasps were wrenched from their sockets. A tiny seed had become a tree that had pushed aside the stones.

The dynamic life force contained in that little seed is a faint reflection of the tremendous power of God's Spirit that lives within his people. Power to overcome evil. Power to

bring his love and mercy to bear on this broken and hurting world. Power that will someday call to life the bodies of all who are in their graves.

The great Easter truth is that not only can we have life after death – we can be made new here and now by the power of the Resurrection; not only can we live forever through Christ, but through him we can live fully and powerfully in that risen life in the here and now.

Let me close with a prayer Paul prayed for the Christian Church at Ephesus. It is a prayer for all of us as well.

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”

May God enlighten our hearts this day. Amen