

# *bodily resurrection*

a sermon preached on the  
*second Sunday of Easter*

27 April 2014

at

*st john's*

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

by *fr david moore*, vicar

the lections: Acts 5:27-32, Revelation 1:4-8, John 20:19-31

When too much emphasis is placed on Thomas, as is inclined to be the case on the second Easter Sunday, the resurrected Christ can recede from view. Surely the real point of the story is not Thomas' status, but that which is summed up in Thomas' declaration: "My Lord and my God!"<sup>1</sup> The true focus is the resurrected Christ in their midst.

So it is right and proper to concentrate on the nature Christ's resurrected body – it is not just an 'academic point'. But here, as with so many matters theological, lies great danger, in a neurotic Christian fixation with attempted 'proofs' for the 'bodily resurrection of Christ', in shouted declarations of 'belief. For it is perfectly possible to defend his 'bodily resurrection' as an idea – as many do, sometimes threateningly, even violently – yet fail to embody, to manifest, to express personally and in a real and loving manner actual resurrection life. To paraphrase Meister Eckhart: 'What use is it if Christ is resurrected in the body, but I am also not myself embodying resurrection?'

These Johannine 'behind closed door' encounters the apostles have with the resurrected Christ do tell us some absolutely vital things about us, and about the nature of resurrection life: betrayal, suffering, and death plunge we humans into the depths of doubt and fear; fear causes us to lock the doors of our hearts, a futile attempt at securing ourselves against a threatening world; our fear is bound to be projected onto some external object, institution, person, which turns out to express some unacknowledged shadow aspect of ourselves; only the unfathomable peace of God is able to penetrate such a barricaded heart;<sup>2</sup> such peace is no mere fantasy untroubled by suffering, but clearly and bodily bears the marks of suffering and death; the reality of such embodied truth alone opens both eyes and hearts to rejoicing;<sup>3</sup> the gift, the grace, that pours out of this embodied suffering is forgiveness;<sup>4</sup> hearing about such ideas from others, no matter how convincing they may imagine themselves to be, is ultimately unconvincing, for only an actual, embodied experience can ever be truly compelling;<sup>5</sup> the result of which is always an unshakeable knowing, 'My Lord and my God!'

John truly understood much about the nature of the human psyche, long before the word became commonplace.

In all this we can see that resurrection is the fulfilment of incarnation. Flesh, matter, *matters* – which is why we are bound to heal the sick, set free the imprisoned, house the homeless, defend the poor, and so on. In Christ resurrected is an *experience* of the affirmation of the body, the supreme ennoblement of all matter, all flesh. A religion overly dominated by 'beliefs', by propositions, tends to being anti-incarnational. Such tragically distorted religion – which is not Christian at all – despises the body, flesh, matter, the earth. For Christ's body matters, because his body – wounded, suffering, dying – is to be found in every conceivable corner of the world. And he invites every person now to reach into the suffering of the world, *this world*<sup>6</sup> – to see the mark of the nails of injustice, violence, oppression, and hatred; to place our finger in wounded hands wherever we find them; to thrust our hand into the human body which is daily pierced, by brutality, greed, envy, scapegoating, self-interest, callousness, neglect, nationalism, xenophobia, and every form of bread-and-circus mass-minded unconsciousness.

Thus, without a real body, religious doctrines and liturgical statements are pretty well meaningless – worse still, frequently violent. As anyone can observe, it's quite easy for a person living in the lap of Australian suburban luxury to confidently and loudly declare a 'belief' in the bodily resurrection of Christ yet exhibit some deeply un-Christlike attitudes and behaviours – including using this 'belief' as a bludgeon against others or as a blunt instrument of church party politics. To claim belief in 'the bodily resurrection of Christ' while

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<sup>1</sup> John 20:28

<sup>2</sup> John 20:19

<sup>3</sup> John 20:20

<sup>4</sup> John 20:21-22

<sup>5</sup> John 20:25

<sup>6</sup> John 20:27

turning a blind eye to injustice and violence against Christ's body, to aggressively claim 'belief' which in fact spawns bigotry, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, which conceals misuse of power, inequity of resources, destruction of the planet, this is so obviously sheer blasphemy against Christ.

*Bodily* resurrection most certainly does matter, illuminating the profound difference between the ever-present threat of aggressive and brutal 'belief', and the transfiguring love of the enfleshed living Body of Christ!

And the good news of the Paschal Mystery – which is the cause of our 50 days of 'Alleluias!' – is precisely this: the world's suffering – whatever particular suffering may be our individual experience, and including the suffering we all endure at the hands of those aggressively asserting a violent, un-Christlike disembodied 'belief' – is neither the last word nor is it meaningless. Like the One into whom we are drowned in baptism – and whose very substance we take into ourselves in the mystery of the Eucharist – it is *our very wounds* that are the actual embodied means by which the barricaded doors of our hearts will be penetrated, by which the grace of forgiveness and life will be breathed into the world.

This earth-turning development – this astounding, evolutionary, quantum leap breakthrough in human consciousness – begins in Jesus the Christ, yes of course. Yet only finds its fulfilment when completed in the real and fleshy bodies of Christ's brothers and sisters.<sup>7</sup> We, now, as Theresa of Avila declared, are Christ's body – pierced, yes, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to penetrate even the most fearful and barricaded of hearts.

This, surely, is the miracle of the 'resurrection of the body'.

vicar@stjohnscamberwell.org.au