

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

John 20:1-10

11th August 2019

Spirit... unbind us... and set us free... in the words we use... in the songs we sing... in the silences between the sentences... in the community we create... unbinds us and set us free to speak, sing, pause and live... So be it... Amen

A long while ago... I was in Kelvingrove... with my daughter... There was a particularly good organist playing that day... you may have heard of him... he's sitting behind me right now... and we had heard a rumour that one of the pieces was to be the theme tune to Dr Who...

It was therefore imperative that my daughter... who was still at that stage admitting she watched Dr Who... only in order to please her dad I am sure... went to experience the music... in the setting of Kelvingrove...

While we were waiting... we wandered round the art and discovered a room that has since become our familiar favourite... smaller pieces... that were not classical images... lots of bright colours... and we sat looking at one of them in particular... talking about it... how we felt about it... when a small group of people arrived... led by a guide... who nodded in our direction by way of apology for interrupting our reflection... and then proceeded to explain the meaning of the painting... what the artist was trying to say... how the artist felt...

After they moved on... my daughter and I were left... with a somewhat reduced experience... the gloss had been taken off our own experience of the painting... because the painting having been rationally explained... became simply something to learn and know about... and the open-ended experience of what it did to us... our relationship... our questions... our wonder... was somewhat flattened because we felt there was now a correct way to engage with that painting... and we needed an expert to help us do that... we didn't have the training or the knowledge...

So we returned to the main hall... and waited for Dr Who to arrive... which he, slash, she... did... to great applause and a few whoops... No one was going to tell this crowd how to understand and interpret the music...

But the painting has never the same... There is something so 21 century about that... we're sophisticated rationalists... we imagine we know what truth is... and we look for the expert to interpret the painting or story for us... and leave having gained that new knowledge... yet have we just lost the deeper experience?...

Faith however... ought not to be like that... A 21st century response is not always appropriate for stories that have evolved in different cultures and eras...

Yet... we've taken stories like resurrection... and turned them into pieces of knowledge to agree with... religious dogma with a specific commentary... and a particular way to understand... given to us by experts... It's become only a piece of factual history to believe happened... or not happened... completely losing the deeper purpose of such stories... which lies beyond intellectual knowledge... that instead invites the experience of resurrection... of what it does to us...

And when you read the variety of resurrection stories... all of them different... remarkably so sometimes... that often contradict... we've got a man who walks through walls... another of two friends joined by a stranger... sharing a meal at Emmaus... who disappears completely soon as the bread is broken... We've got stories of Jesus walking in the garden... and others that he is not there at all but in Galilee... ones where he can't eat or be touched... and others where he is eating fish on a beach and inviting Thomas to specifically touch his wounds... Such variety suggests the gospels are not trying to write history... they are trying to explain an experience...

You can't tie resurrection down... It is a varied and various experience... yet religious experts have written much and preached even more on what we are to believe about it...

But the resurrection... is not about giving intellectual ascent to something that happened... That's not the purpose of these stories... the purpose is about experiencing something... and each story we have been given in the gospels... invites us to share that experience... of something that cannot be explained... and unbind the truth from an intellectual approach... which is what Jesus always did in order to speak of the kingdom... He used his imagination and made up stories of Good Samaritans and

Prodigal Sons and Lost Sheep and fish with coins in their mouths... to speak of the truth...

We are the only culture in our history... that has decided truth is based on fact... Every other era and culture recognise truth is in story... It is what the story does to us... that is important... and the experience of hope and promise for those who know this world is fragile and fickle... full of bullies and narcissistic leadership...

In experiencing the resurrection story... we know truth will out... justice will come... In this world that is such a mess... caught up in selfish populism and narrow-mindedness... the experience of resurrection tells us light is greater than the dark... In a world that is bent on responding with violence... or prejudice... towards the least in the world... then resurrection gives us the experience of the truth... that love has the last word... not death...

And you can't trust that if the only way we engage with resurrection is on an intellectual level... Gospel truth is experiencing how this story changes how we live and see and respond to the world... a story that has us hanging on in there despite what the world throws at us... Resurrection is not an intellectual fact to agree with... resurrection is defiance...

It is far too important to be anything other... far too important to be an article in church doctrine... far too important even for the church to own it... and her experts to tell us how to understand it... that ruins the experience because it tells you how it is to be understood... the church herself missing out on the experience...

Resurrection is the experience of love unbound and set free from the very structures that tried to kill it... The stories are the experience of that defiant truth...

The earliest followers were not tied down to an intellectual belief in facts... They lived the experience of Jesus alive among them through the eyes of faith... the experience of a defiant love they discovered could not be destroyed... now found among them... in community...

And we need the experience of resurrection now... It is not limited... to some past historical event... but an experience that is real now...

The vicar and journalist Giles Fraser says of his parish... Mine can be a tough parish... Stuff is always going on... After Easter mass, a car screeched into our car park and crashed into a brick wall, knocking it down... Four guys got out and had a fight... Then they got back in the car and drove off... Stuff like this happens all the time... I called the Brixton police three times on Easter Sunday...

And its not just the daily round of hassle... We have no money... a heating system that doesn't work... a church hall that was recently burned out by bored teenagers...

For too long, our little garden of remembrance has been a place thick with the deathly thorns of heroin needles... But now all that's been cleared away by a few determined parish gardeners... and a little strip of cared-for land has emerged, resplendent with daffodils... Likewise, between Christmas and Easter, we opened up the church to the homeless... with local people, both churchgoers and non-churchgoers... teaming up to cook food and provide guests with a safe place to sleep...

And he ends... I know the Church is supposed to be dying... but there has been a priest in my parish continuously since the reign of King John in the early 13th century... Politicians call it resilience... I call it resurrection...

For my colleague... resurrection is a daily experience of defiance... and in the experience finds the truth... that hope and love defy the odds...

Let's talk of resurrection like this... Nae let's stop talking... instead lets live the story... and have faith in the experience...