

He is risen! He is risen, indeed!

Matthew's account of the resurrection might be my favourite because it is literally earth shaking. More than any other of the gospel accounts of what happened as the first day of the week was dawning, this account describes the resurrection as an apocalyptic event with immediate public consequences. There is no missing the point here that what happened when Jesus was raised from the dead shocked witnesses and affected (shook!) the world itself.

Some 20th century theologians focus on the resurrection as an event that took place in the life of the disciples, a mysterious personal event, a spiritual transformation that led to faith in the crucified Jesus as the most profound sign of God's presence in the world. But I don't think Mathew is letting us get away with thinking that this is a purely spiritual transformation. There's an earthquake, and angel descending in the sight of the women and the guards and rolling away the stone. The actual, heavy, solid physically real stone. The guards were so terrified that they became like dead men. Fainted? Paralysed with fear? These are Roman soldiers, they've waged war and crucified people. They were not going to be terrified by anything that wasn't very real and physical and concrete

This was not a private theological realisation or transformation event happening within the spiritual lives of the disciples...Oh its a mystery all right but it testifies to the very real inbreaking of God's reign in the physical real actual world we are walking around in.

So I think we have to face that, face the physical reality of it.... and ask ourselves what does this resurrection mean?

What does it mean that when the women met Jesus on the road, that they had no trouble recognising him...which is in contrast to the accounts in Luke and John.....and that they were able to take hold of his feet? To me it suggests that Matthew is saying this body was recognisably similar to the one that was crucified and laid in the tomb three days earlier. And I think that this matters, that this Jesus is recognizably the same Jesus who taught and healed and fed the hungry, who had walked the roads of Galilee with these women. To me this confirms that the historical embodied physical life of Jesus matters to God and that God draws this physical Jesusnot some other spiritual version of him...out of death into new life. And this matters to me because it also says that cares about our historical embodied physical lives, and about the bodies of all in the world who suffer in their actual physical circumstances....and our hope lies not in some disembodied spiritual realm but in the redemption of our very bodies from death.

And this is a mystery to be lived with...not to be explained.

Jesus being raised from the dead was not itself a visible, public event. All we see in any gospel account is the empty tomb and/or the risen Christ....both in this passage. There are no witnesses to tell us what did or did not happen to Jesus' body. This is the mystery, the silence, the gap in the centre of Christian faith. But wrapped around that gap is the certainty that something monumental happened that altered the world order, overturning what we think we know about the relationship of death and life and the coming of God's reign. We reject the truth, or we try to find ways to explain it that will make us comfortable because it is not

normal for the things described in today's gospel to happen....well let me tell you....you're right. It is not normal

We have become accustomed, in the aftermath and lingering effects of COvid 19 to refer to something called the new normal. We do this because we long for things to be normal, we fear disruption, so we try to tame it by calling it the new normal. BUt you can't do that to the resurrection. Oh its new alright but its never going to be normal, tame, ordinary and easy to live with.

There's an earthquake, an angel descending who looks like lightning, a huge stone rolled away, some of caesar's finest literally shaking in their sandals.....we are not simply standing on the edge of dawn that first day of the week, we are standing on the precipice of a strange and wonderful, confusing and badly shaken new world. Come and see, says the angel to the women, look at what the world fails to notice.....peer over the edge, peer into the darkness, see the wonder that God has worked among us. The earth has shifted on its axis, a badly damaged creation is being restored, and God is at last having God's way with our sin and death....and not without a shake rattle and roll.

It can be tempting, because we fear disruption, to shield our eyes from the blinding truth of the resurrection. If we've been trained to think of religion, of church, as the cement of social stability, conformity and good order in the community then it can be tricky to hear something as destabilising, as literally earthshaking as the literal truth of the resurrection. Maybe you got us up this morning, got dressed and got yourself to church with a similar expectation to the women who got up to go visit the tomb... to go see the place where they think Jesus is...and expecting nothing to have changedand maybe just as surprised, just as fearful and joyful, as the women...to discover that God is not trapped

in here....dead and inactive....He's alive and on the move out there.
Headed for Galilee and who knows where else,
Can it really be that there is a victorious power loose in this world that is more powerful than any emperor, sin and death? Can it be that God is on the move out there?

This story is about God who is not simply love...but love FOR US. Love in action, love out there, on the move, love taking on our battles with sin and death, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. This is the force that is loose in the world, that is stronger than death, more powerful than Caesar's legions or our betrayal and lack of faith. This is the God who raises the dead and makes a way when we think there is no way....

Can you peer with the women into so great and inexplicable a wonder? Will you also leave with fear and great joy? Joy at God's great vindication of the crucified Jesus and fear at the earthshaking implications of God's great disruptive shaking of the world in resurrection. Come....see.