

The Resurrection: Great Rescue Operation
1Corinthians 15:12-20
April 12, 2020

We saw on Friday that the cross is central in the New Testament. But the cross and resurrection go together. The cross by itself is an amazing demonstration of God's love for the world. But, as Paul will argue in his letter to the Corinthian Christians, without the resurrection the cross is powerless to save us. Paul puts it this way in our reading from Corinthians: *If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.* He goes on to say that if the dead are not raised then, *let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.* (1Cor. 15:17;32)

Last year Gail and I were in Jerusalem. Perhaps the most memorable moment in that amazing tour of Israel, and there were many, was our visit to the Garden Tomb. Jerusalem offers two locations for the tomb. The most celebrated and certainly the most popular is the one within the city. But the other, run by a Christian group is quieter, and frankly felt and looked much more authentic. It is right next to a rock face called "scull hill". The day we went was quiet and we were able to go right into the tomb without crowds pushing us to move. It was a quiet, awe-inspiring moment. You could feel the presence of the eternal in that small, empty space. We then went to celebrate communion with our tour group. Jesus was buried here for three days. And then he left!

There are many critical moments in our lives when we are forced to pause and ponder. One of those moments for me was the death of my father. He was an authority figure in our household, a man who stood erect, proud, and morally upright. I'll never forget the day when we were looking out our living room window, he turned to me and said: "I've had a good life!" By today's standards his life was very simple. He never traveled beyond a hundred miles of his home, only went on a week's holiday once that I can remember, and found his calling in his work in the barber shop he ran. I was 17 when he fell down dead in front of us. I now believe this was one of those life-changing moments for me. I remember the silence that engulfed the house as his dead body lay in the living room overnight. When the

undertaker came to pick my father's body I was asked to help lift my father into the casket. I was so afraid I couldn't even look down on his dead body. There was no hiding the finality of death in those days.

I wonder now, did this open me to the Gospel I would hear when I arrived in Canada just a year later? Looking back I believe now that my father's death had a profound influence on my psyche. I don't know, but I suspect that these experiences opened up my heart to the spiritual which previously had been closed tight. It certainly made me more vulnerable, more sensitive, and more open to a new future.

As Tom Wright reminds us in his book, **Simply Christian**, resurrection is not merely pointing us to the correct path so we end up on the right side of the painting in the Sistine Chapel. What it is about surely, is that: **With Jesus, God's rescue operation has been put into effect once for all. A great door has swung open in the cosmos which can never again be shut. It is the door to the prison where we have been kept chained up.** Heaven and earth meet, no longer in the Temple, the locus of God's symbolic presence on earth, but in Jesus. In him God's future breaks into our time and space.

In short, resurrection to new life is not merely a stamped ticket for the paradise train going to heaven. It is the guarantee of the living presence of God within us here and now. It is God's call to us to be active in helping make God's future real in the present. God's rescue plan is for the whole creation, not just lost souls. God is passionate about our bodily existence, as he is about every physical reality. God wishes to restore it. This is what the resurrection of Jesus Christ points us to. Listen to Paul in Romans:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for the adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom 8:22ff)

Halleluiah, Christ is Risen! Amen, Amen

Amen