

Hymn: Christ Triumphant

Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
hear us as we sing:
*Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name.*

Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
power and majesty concealing
by your humble birth:
Yours the glory...

Suffering servant, scorned, ill - treated,
victim crucified!
death is through the cross defeated,
sinners justified:
Yours the glory...

Priestly king, enthroned for ever
high in heaven above!
sin and death and hell shall never
stifle hymns of love:
Yours the glory...

So, our hearts and voices raising
through the ages long,
ceaselessly upon you gazing,
this shall be our song:
Yours the glory...

Michael Saward (1932-2015)
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Luke 24:36-48

If you ask several witnesses to give their accounts of the same incident, their stories will have common themes, but the details will differ. Does this matter? Does it show them to be lying?

Not necessarily at all. The different accounts will be because different elements were important to each of them, because they remembered different parts, their concerns and interpretations varied, and so on. Some may summarise part of the event, and others may spell out things in word-for-word detail.

Those who criticise the accounts of the Resurrection in the four Gospels for being so different need to remember basic elements of human nature like this. And our story this week seems to be Luke's account of at least the first of the two resurrection appearances behind locked doors that we considered in John 20:19-31 last week.

So in Luke's account, what does Jesus want his disciples to learn about the Resurrection?

Firstly, Jesus wants his disciples to understand that the **physical** nature of the Resurrection.

Look at the two proofs he gives them. Firstly, Jesus invites the disciples to touch his hands and feet to prove that he has flesh and bones, unlike a ghost (verse 38), which is what in their fear they thought they had seen (verse 37).

In other words, Jesus isn't an ethereal being. He isn't a spirit who has found no place to rest in death. He is not 'a cadaver brought back to life'¹, nor is he a zombie: this is not an episode of '[The Walking Dead](#)'. This is no horror movie. There is no need to fear. Jesus has been resurrected to material, physical life. Sure, it is different in some ways. But it is still physical.

This is underlined by the second proof Jesus gives, when the disciples are still too emotional to believe. He asks for food and promptly devours some fish (verses 41-43). As the only fish and seafood eater in his family, I approve enthusiastically!

When Jesus eats the fish, he isn't just showing he has a physical body, he is also emphasising 'an "immortal soul" free from bodily existence'². That's important for us, because too often we default to that view of life after death. We say things like 'the body isn't important, it's just a shell for the real person', but this is what the Greek philosophers believed, not what the New Testament apostles believed. And it's a disastrous belief to follow through on.

Why? Because if the body doesn't matter, then it certainly doesn't matter if we abuse it. Nor does it matter if we abuse someone else's body, despite the physical and emotional pain we cause.

And if the body doesn't matter it's probably a sign that physical and material things generally don't matter. Therefore we just believe in a spiritual heaven. We don't need to worry about damage to the world, because, like the dreadful old hymn said,

This world is not my home,
I'm just passing through.

So we need to turn this round and be positive. Jesus' physical resurrection is a sign that God cares about the physical and material. Remember that in the creation story of Genesis 1, he looked at each stage of creation and either pronounced it 'good' or 'very good'. God's attitude to his material creation hasn't changed. The Resurrection tells us that he intends to redeem it.

Remember how Revelation 21 speaks of a new heaven and a new earth, and of God making all things new. Well, the Resurrection is the beginning of that process.

The Resurrection is therefore why we care about healing. The Resurrection is why we care about justice. The Resurrection is why we care about climate change and creation care. Take away the Resurrection and none of those things matters. But they do matter, because God is about making all things new, including the material world, and the physical Resurrection is his supreme sign to the world that these matter.

So think of Jesus eating the fish next time you eat fish and chips. Our Catholic friends eat fish on a Friday to avoid eating meat on Good Friday, when we commemorate the death of Christ. But I suggest to you it's every bit as valid to eat your fish and chips on a Sunday, when we celebrate the Resurrection, because it reminds us of Jesus' physical resurrection and all that rides on it.

And therefore, don't just think about the physical nature of the Resurrection: go into the world to bring healing to people, to relationships, and to the creation itself. Don't let the truth of Jesus' physical resurrection stay residing in your brain: let that truth travel to your hands and feet and make a resurrection difference in the world.

Secondly, Jesus wants his disciples to understand the *place* of the Resurrection in the purposes of God.

Proof and evidence are important, but they only take us so far. They are the preparing of the ground for commitment. We can provide solid evidence for the Christian faith, but on its own it doesn't bring anybody to Christ. It prepares someone's heart and mind for the challenge of commitment. That is what has happened so far in this story, and it's often what happens in discussions with people today.

To make the jump from understanding to commitment, we need Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to interpret the purposes of God to us. We need that spiritual element.

And that's what Jesus does when he 'open[s] their minds so they could understand the Scriptures' (verse 45). It takes a divine unveiling to appreciate the purposes of God and then be ready to throw our lot in with Jesus.

So now that's what Jesus does. He reveals the place of the Resurrection in the divine purposes. He says it was always God's plan that the Messiah would suffer, die, and be raised, and that this would lead to the preaching of repentance throughout the world (verses 46-47).

But that's rather puzzling. Because taken on their own the Scriptures in question (which are basically the Old Testament as we know it) don't make such claims in any particularly obvious way. You can only start to see it in the light of the Resurrection. Then you begin to understand what God was up to in the prophecies of the Servant in Isaiah, or the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days in Daniel, or the Lord inviting another Lord to sit at his right hand in the Psalms. You wouldn't have guessed without the Resurrection.

But now the penny drops and Jesus tells his disciples, 'You are witnesses of these things' (verse 48). This comes back to that favourite Tom Wright quote of mine, 'Jesus is alive and we've got a job to do.'

Why? The Resurrection shows that God has vindicated Jesus. Those who called for his crucifixion are exposed as in the wrong, and we realise we are all in the wrong before him. We all need to hear the call to repentance, because in the Resurrection God says that Jesus is in the right and we are in the wrong.

So the Resurrection is here to bring two changes in our lives. One is repentance, as we renounce our selfish ways of living to follow Jesus. The

second is we are moved from inward-looking to outward-looking, because this concurs with the application of the physical nature of the Resurrection. But not only are we sent into the world with the message of the healing of all creation, we now realise that healing message is also about healing the rift between people and God.

Now I'm not suggesting this means that we use every minute of the day to bludgeon people with the Gospel: many of us have been subjected to that and know how bad it feels. But what it does mean is that we have this outward-looking focus where as disciples of the risen Lord our passion is for the healing of creation, the healing of people, the healing of relationships, and the healing of the breach between people and God. We shall show that in our actions and our priorities, and we shall speak when the time is right and when opportunities come.

Remember: God is making all things new, and he began that task when he raised Jesus from death.

Hymn: Jesus Is King

Jesus is King and I will extol Him
Give Him the glory and honour His name
He reigns on high, enthroned in the heavens
Word of the Father exalted for us

We have a hope that is steadfast and certain
Gone through the curtain and touching the throne
We have a Priest who is there interceding
Pouring His grace on our lives day by day

We come to Him our Priest and Apostle
Clothed in His glory and bearing His name
Laying our lives with gladness before Him
Filled with His Spirit we worship the King

O Holy One, our hearts do adore You
Thrilled with Your goodness we give You our praise
Angels in light with worship surround Him
Jesus our Saviour forever the same

Extempore Prayers

Hymn: There Is A Redeemer

There is a Redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Holy One

Jesus my Redeemer
Name above all names
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
O for sinners slain

*Thank you, O my Father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done*

When I stand in Glory
I will see His face
And there I'll serve my King forever
In that Holy Place

*Thank you, O my Father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done*

There is a Redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Holy One

*Thank you, O my Father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done*

*And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done.*

Melody Green
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Blessing

May the peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God
and of his Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
And may the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you all, now and forever. **Amen.**

¹ Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, p854.

² *Ibid.*