

“He is risen indeed” a sermon preached by Kerry Enright on Easter Sunday in Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand based on Luke 24:1-12

On Friday we heard the story of the crucifixion of Jesus as told in the gospel of John. It was vivid, comprehensible, understandable.

We heard about a cross, a body, a tomb, people anointing the body. It was tactile, physical, visible. People don't struggle to believe in the death of Jesus.

Resurrection doesn't seem so concrete. But it is.

I had a parishioner who was a recovering alcoholic - he has been recovering for over twenty years. Resurrection.

A few years ago I met a young woman who had been in a youth group I led, who after a terrible incident became addicted to drugs, who in her mature years showed the signs of long addiction, but who has been recovering for some years, and who was working as a drug counsellor for the Salvation Army. Resurrection

One of the great churches of resurrection in Australia is the Wayside Chapel in Kings Cross Sydney. Every day people living on the edge find support and acceptance there. The minister there Graham Long tells the story of a guy who called him over to talk. “I need your help,” he said. “I feel like my life has been lived on autopilot and that I'm just starting to wake up.” He had been living on the street and had witnessed a man will himself to death. “In four days, he willed himself to death, and I saw it before my own eyes. If I hadn't seen this, I wouldn't have believed it possible.” What had the greatest impact though, was that the man had left all his worldly goods to this neighbour in the park – a plastic bag containing a bottle of port, a packet of cigarettes and a quarter of a stale sandwich was all that the man had. And during the night as he inched towards death, he had pushed the plastic bag towards this man. This was his last gift and it so affected this man that he wanted to really live, to wake up. Resurrection.

I visited a project in the south of India. In the village was a water reticulation system that took water to people's homes, except for Dalits, the untouchables. They could only take water from one or two taps of dirty water on the outskirts of the village. So we supported the Church of South India to work with the villagers until everyone was able to have access to clean water. Resurrection.

On the island of Maluku in Indonesia, Muslims and Christians killed each other. Distrust ran deep. For years and years. Generations trapped in an unending cycle of hatred, that just

kept feeding itself. Mosques and churches burnt and vandalised. Thousands of people killed. Hundreds of thousands displaced. Until a group of young Muslims and Christians started with themselves to break the cycle. It has been tough. I was in a group when at one moment a young Muslim man dramatically pushed aside the candles we had lit for peace in an angry and verbal outburst, and then he was surrounded and hugged and hugged by his colleagues, Christians and Muslims. Trust is building. Resurrection.

When I was a lawyer, young people would be dealt with in the youth court with humanity, yes, but it was the most depressing of all courts because the outcome seemed inevitable and we felt trapped by the process. Then, through the efforts of people like Principal Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft and others, young people are being dealt with differently, more personally, more respectfully, and, we pray, with different results. Resurrection.

Now you might say, Kerry, these are just good human things. This has nothing to do with Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

Well, you might be right.

But I choose to believe that this person, Jesus Christ, is the epitome of what it means to be human, to be who we were created to be – so when I see things happening consistent with his way, I believe he is there.

I choose to believe that in his life and death and rising, God broke open all our tombs, broke open human inevitability, disrupted trapped ways of being human, opened up closed off possibilities for being human, broke them open so the outcome became unpredictable.

I choose to believe that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God loosened human processes so a deeper humanness became possible.

More than that, I choose to believe that one day, Jesus' way of life and humanity, will be the way people live, and that it is breaking in on our lives now, like waves on our beach, that all these incidents and millions of others are linked. There is a pattern beneath them, a deeper mosaic, and we see the pattern in the story of the resurrection.

I have spoken before about South Sudan. It remains with me because I was there just two weeks before the latest violence broke out. If any country, like Syria, has a reason to despair it is South Sudan. Clans have been fighting each other, with millions displaced, with hundreds of thousands killed, with hospitals and schools and cities destroyed, for nearly 30 years. For a brief couple of years, as the newest nation in the world, it managed somehow to have some peace. I believe it is not inevitable that this nation will destroy itself, that even in that place are the seeds of resurrection, and that is why we keep finding people, away from the obvious, away from the news, away from the pattern, who are working and praying and striving for peace.

Frederick Buechner, writer, Presbyterian minister – “Resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing.”

In the gospel the people who sensed that were the women, because they had known the worst thing, they had experienced the worst thing, and they had seen his risen way even before he died, how he had broken free of the rules and the restrictions and the stereotypes and the inevitabilities and the rigidities, all the tombs people tried to build.

The woman with whom Jesus conversed around the well in the town centre in the middle of the day.

The woman brought to the centre of the community from which she had been ostracised for years.

The woman who felt she was as able to be a disciple and sit at the feet of Jesus as much as any man would have.

They had seen the tomb crack open.

Their story here is seen as idle gossip. They weren't believed.

But they sensed the worst was not the last.

Now from a cool distance these things are neither here nor there. From a dispassionate distance, these things don't really matter. In an atmosphere of disinterest, it is a nothing.

But for people who have glimpsed freedom, acceptance, inclusion, wholeness - resurrection is everything.

Resurrection upsets all that seeks to control, to tie down, to predict, to predetermine, to entomb. The untamed Jesus is loose in the world.

Peter's response was amazement, but he went home.

The women though, told the story to others, and so they nourished a community, a community of resurrection.

Can we be a community that tells stories of resurrection and become a community of resurrection?

I felt called to a particular congregation - people tried to dissuade me from going. A former Moderator of the Assembly who knew the congregation well, phoned me – Kerry don't go.

You saw what happened to the last minister. He had resigned in difficulty. Don't go because the future of the congregation was predetermined. It would never change.

But I felt called. And yes, it was torrid at times, the Session and I went through the mill. We cried together. We struggled together. Yet we had a sense of who we could be as a community of resurrection, chasing after the risen Christ loose in our city. We did not know exactly where, or exactly how, or with whom. But we knew our future lay with him where people thought the worst was the final word. All we knew was, to be the church, we had to be where he was, as free as he was, as raised as he was.

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