

## OK - The Lord Is Risen! Now What?

2019 Easter 2

John 21:19-31 NRSV

### *Jesus Appears to the Disciples*

<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

### *Jesus and Thomas*

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

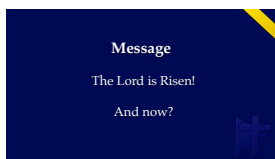
<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

### *The Purpose of This Book*

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Acts 5:27-32 NRSV

<sup>27</sup> When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup> saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us.' <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority. <sup>30</sup> The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'



### **Intro:**

Today is the second Sunday of Easter. Last week we joyfully marked the discovery of the empty tomb and the explanation: "He is not here, he has risen." Today we are celebrating the resurrection appearances that followed and particularly when Thomas finally got to meet the risen Lord after hearing about it for 8 days.

Speaking about "The Lord is Risen." I want to move from asking 'Really?' as I did last week, to asking: 'So what?' I am going to assume that we here today believe Jesus is risen indeed but are still working out, 'So what?' or 'How do we live that?'

Since the Easter Outreach Dinner three weeks ago I have been using the metaphor of 'The Box' to explore the resurrection. With this image I am describing the horizons of life and imagination however that is constructed. It might be the view of life as totally captured by our birth, our life, and our death. It may be the view of all reality being the outworking of matter and time as if matter and time can ultimately explain everything.



Then for some, the box is the belief that reality is what we can measure or value in Euros and no more. These are examples of the box many people live in by default or by conscious choice.

For people who accept some form of closed box as their frame of reality they can only find meaning within it. Philosophically that is very difficult but people still try and then seek to convince others of their convictions. Living as if the box is everything is difficult yet that is the choice many people make.

What people arrive at in the search for meaning within the box are more like coping mechanisms. So there is an abundance of advice on ‘How to...’ live in the box that is life, work, relationships and such. This is the normal human understanding in the world around me. This is what schools, caring professions, government etc. all work to. In the public world today there is no agreed meaning, no metanarrative and no comprehensive plot so performance is everything.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ comes as a disruption and violation of whatever box people may imagine and settle for - or impose on others. The resurrection of Jesus is about life from outside the box that was broken within the box but broke out of the box. That sequence is marked by Christmas, Good Friday and Easter.

The box that made to contain us has been ruined as a closed container of human life and existence. One got away and in leaving shattered the door!

In the resurrection of Jesus,

- The lid or door has been ripped off and a greater human life intruded into the world.
- Through Jesus, life in the box now connects with life here with life outside the box
- Jesus is still human now but based outside the box and Lord over it.

That is my story of the box and the resurrection.

So with that I go to today’s question: The Lord is Risen - Do we really get it?

Do we have a vision for what our life can be in the resurrection, even now while located here in the world?

*Illustration A:*

One of my roles at home is fly-catcher. When a large fly bothers Barbara I take a glass and a place mat and catch it against the window. Assuming a Franciscan stance, I then take Brother Fly out of the house to move him on. What I notice is that when I get outside and take the cover off the glass, Brother Fly usually stays there. I wait a second or two before then throwing him upwards and out of the glass.

It would seem that within a few minutes of being caught the fly has made the glass its home. The fly has habituated or accepted the glass as its world - its ‘box’.

The human equivalent of that is all around me. In this part of the world people have worked hard to make the box comfortable and secure as possible in the belief that this life is all there is so make the most of it. I hear that godless message preached often! That is the fly staying in the glass even when the lid is taken off.

The resurrection of Jesus establishes a similar fundamental change in reality which calls for adjustment similar to that facing the fly when the lid is taken off or a caged bird when the door is opened.

*Illustration B:*

When something fundamental changes people respond to it in different ways. This happens in church too!



The story that illustrates this best for me refers to a hole in a brick wall. In this telling the hole represents the resurrection of Jesus blasting the lid off the box of life as people knew it.

In this story a hole is somehow smashed in the brick wall surrounding a community. The wall has always been there.

- The first person arrives at the scene and without hesitating steps through the hole in the wall and enters the new space and never looks back. He/she is away. We may call that person a ‘Radical.’
- The next person arrives and stops to consider the scene. They look it over and decide to walk through. I call that person a ‘Progressive’ with a glass half-full mentality.
- A third person arrives and likewise, stops to consider the situation. They spend a lot of time looking back around at what is familiar as well as looking through the hole. When looking through they see the progressive and begin a conversation. They want some assurance. They need more time to consider. Depending on how their conversation with the Progressive runs they may decide to carefully step through or may choose not to. I label this person as a ‘Conservative’. They tend to be ‘glass half-empty’ types.
- A fourth person arrives, sees the hole and without a moment’s hesitation they begin to brick up the hole to maintain the status quo. They do not want a hole in the wall to another reality. They may be described as a ‘Reactionary’. They will fight any fundamental change to their last breath.

I tell that story to illustrate what churches and people do with the resurrection. They are all present and recognizable, the Radical, the Progressive, the Conservative and the Reactionary.

Real resurrection believers are those who step through the hole.

The women in the burial garden were radical and wanted to take hold of Jesus there and then. They believed 100% and were not looking back.

The 11 disciples were all over the place as progressives and conservatives with some still doubting even at the Ascension.

Saul of Tarsus was a total reactionary who did all he could to brick up the hole until he himself met the Lord. Then he became a radical.

All of these are still present in church life and colour the church’s history as the resurrection community.

Here is a short clip which illustrates someone who has ‘walked through the hole’ and is living life here and now with reference to the hole made by the resurrection.

See video clip of Pastor Roshan Mahesan of Zion Church, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. *Play to 2:45.96*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=14&v=ZCKkabURISQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=14&v=ZCKkabURISQ)

With 28 church members killed and about 70 currently hospitalized he demonstrates resurrection thinking. The resurrection of Jesus 3 days after his crucifixion is a bigger reality and is what shapes him in this crisis brought on by the bombings. Radical Christianity will outshine both radical Islam and Communism.

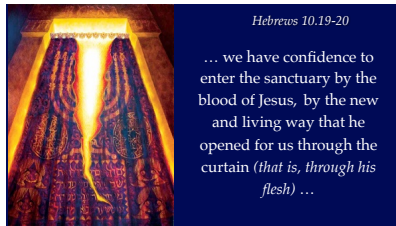
He understands the connection between Jesus’ victory on the cross when he said: “Father forgive them.” and his being raised from the grave three days later. Pastor Roshan and his church are not confined to life in this box with its present darkness. There is a light from beyond in the Risen Lord and they keep eyes and ears on him.

Let’s be encouraged by this witness. Meanwhile there is also a slow work of quiet reactivity and denial long at work in the church as well as brutal enforcement of the box from outside.

*Example A*

Matthew, Mark and Luke all give the account that at the death of Jesus, the curtain of the temple, that thick tightly woven mesh about 20 meters high that separated the Holy of holies where God was pleased to dwell -and the assigned place of meeting- from top to bottom.<sup>1</sup> God was ending this arrangement in the temple and this was implemented at the moment of Jesus' death when it was ripped apart.

When Jesus pushed through, bringing his righteous self-offering to God, God in effect ended the separation and ripped the curtain. Jesus was coming through the sin barrier as the perfect offering from Man to God. Then three days later Jesus' body was raised from the deepest part of the box and all that could separate a human from God – death in the grave.



The Letter to the Hebrews in chapter 10 celebrates it this way:

<sup>19</sup> ... we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh) ...

Here is God dealing with curtains and barriers erected to shield us from a Holy God the way Moses wore a veil to contain his brightness after meeting with God as I discussed a few weeks ago because people often prefer distance over intimacy with God.

God tore curtains and rolled away stones. God took the lid off the box maintaining our separation in sin.

But there is something reactionary at work and Christianity is still infected with curtains and barriers. It's as if something is at work to put the stone back over the tomb and keep us in the Old Covenant as if the Cross and Resurrection never happened.

There are barriers put up between God and people in dividing space as if some space is more holy than other space. There are titles applied of 'reverend' and 'holiness' to separate and distinguish peoples.

The worst example of this for me is the Iconostasis in the Orthodox tradition where a wall is placed in front of the altar with doors accessible only to specific priests.<sup>2</sup> In his death and resurrection Christ tore curtains and tombs were opened but religious instincts can be reactionary and put them back – even in church!

### *Example B*

A second reactionary distortion of the resurrection is the way women have been treated in the resurrection community. God was pleased for women to be the first to see, meet and proclaim the risen Lord. It was they who witnessed to the male disciples and soon to be Apostles. Whatever the arrangements were between men and women in the box with the lid on, the resurrection modeled something else and turned life in the box upside down.

I am disappointed to say that by the European Middle Ages theologians such as Thomas Aquinas had adopted Aristotle's view that a boy fetus received a soul after 40 days and a girl fetus after 90. The church followed. Instead of considering the resurrection as God infusing his new future on earth, Christians followed respectable Greek speculation and climbed deeper into the box. Women have suffered because of this and not been appreciated as front row members and actors in the Resurrection Community.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45

<sup>2</sup> For an Orthodox explanation go to: <http://orthochristian.com/96581.html>

Living in the resurrection takes believers away from the oppressive dynamics and religiosity that people arrange for life in the box. Neglecting and ignoring the resurrection takes us deeper into the box and historically the church has done both.

Outside the church the resurrection is a threat to those who rule through power of a closed box. The clearest example is Communism which is based on an ideology of materialism being the only reality. To maintain this Communist regimes do not allow reference to anything beyond their own power and interests. Communist regimes always set out to destroy the church and they always fail. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus empowers believers to live and die beyond the control of even the most committed atheistic state.

That was tasted by the first apostles in Jerusalem as we heard in the reading from Acts 5 today.

China is currently putting the boot down on the church insisting that all churches conform to the Chinese and Socialist box as it specifies. This will fail as it did in European Communism but with much suffering. The lid has been blown off the box and God will not allow it to be put back.

Humanity was made for communion with God and no level of applied technology or material wealth will provide a box adequate to compensate for life with God. We have a sense of eternity and transcendence which longs for connection here and now which the resurrected Jesus brings to us.

Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in God. - St Augustine

### **Application**



- Have we settled for life in the box or do we seek to live with light of Resurrection?
- Are there curtains, walls or veils in our lives hiding the glory of the Risen Lord?
- When and where can we choose to live resurrection life out of the box?