

Resurrection Blues
1 Corinthians 15:12-22

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Did you get all that? How would you convey that to a student in Year 3? No forget a student in Year 3 . . . how do I convey that to a whole bunch of highly educated educators here today?

Well, let's try this . . . this is WH Auden's poem, 'Funeral Blues' . . . you might remember it from the movie 'Four Weddings and a Funeral'. Funeral Blues . . .

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead'.
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the woods;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

"Nothing now can ever come to any good". That's what St Paul is trying to say. If Christ is not raised then nothing now can ever come to any good.

If Christ is not raised then our faith is useless and baseless. What's the point in believing in a dead God? If God couldn't conquer death, what hope do we have?

If Christ is not raised, then that's it for those who have already died. They have perished . . . simply gone back to the dust from which they were made . . . if Christ has not been raised.

If Christ is not raised, then our hope is only for this life, and we of all people are most to be pitied. The jokes on us. We've been fooled. Our hope only lasts until we die, then hope dies too . . . then there is nothing . . . if Christ has not been raised.

If Christ is not raised then it's all up to us . . . it's up to us to make sense of life . . . it's up to us to give meaning to life . . . it's up to us to overcome the funeral blues . . . and all of our brilliance and cleverness and technology and self confidence comes to a shuddering halt as we stand looking into the grave . . . a coffin being lowered into it.

I did that on Friday . . . someone I didn't even know. It's still confronting. Even more so when it someone you *do* know . . . and love: a child . . . a parent . . . a partner . . . you know how that feels . . . it feels like the stars are not wanted now: put out every one; pack up the moon and dismantle the sun; pour away the ocean and sweep up the woods . . . for nothing now can ever come to any good . . . full stop. That's it . . . the end of the poem . . . the end of life . . . death wins, we lose . . . why bother? . . . end of story.

Well, it would be . . . if it were not for just one little word . . . BUT . . . BUT

Where the poem ends, God's word doesn't . . . St Paul goes on . . . "But in fact Christ *has* been raised!" Christ has been raised . . . and that changes everything!

Death is not the last word . . . God has more to say to us . . . more to give to us . . . and what he has to give is life . . . life through the risen Christ. Because Christ has been raised it is no longer true that 'nothing now can ever come to any good'. What is true now is that 'everything works together for good to those whom God loves'. There is good to be found . . . there is good to be experienced . . . it is good to be alive. In Christ we have life . . . full abundant life . . . now and forever.

You see, Christ's resurrection is not just a past event . . . our resurrection is not just a future event! It's why we proclaim at Easter: "He is risen!" Present tense. Right here . . . right now . . . Christ is risen. So, we live with resurrected life.

Now, I'm not saying you pretend life is always roses and chocolates, as if this is heaven on earth, I'm saying because Christ is risen we always have hope . . . because Christ is risen life has changed . . . life *can* change.

It means every day is redeemable. If you're a teacher it means every *class* is redeemable! It means the relationships we build can last an eternity. It means we look for the good even when bad things happen. It may just be recognizing the friend sitting beside you in your pain . . . it may be holding back the cutting remark you were about to make . . . it may be choosing to forgive instead of hanging on to old hurts . . . it may even be accepting the nod and smile of a stranger in the street even as your own day has been exhausting.

Because Christ is risen, resurrection life is found everywhere . . . resurrection life can be experienced wherever we are . . . we don't have to manufacture it . . . we don't have to give it meaning . . . it is there for us even as we live every day in the shadow of the funeral blues . . . even as we go each day

toward our own death . . . because we do so in the light and with the knowledge that Christ has been raised! The mourning and crying and pain we experience is part of our dying . . . and our living. Every illness is a little death. Every separation is a little death. But, it will not always be that way for us. Like Christ, we will rise. Death will not have the last word. We might fear dying . . . that's natural enough . . . but fear death? No! Not in Christ. In Christ we have life . . . in Christ life always comes good.

As Christians we may be pitied by others for many things, but let us not ever been ashamed of living life to the full . . . let us not ever be ashamed of experiencing life and sharing life . . . in every situation we find ourselves in . . . let us not ever be ashamed of giving life . . . let us not ever be ashamed of being real . . . of mourning and weeping and hurting . . . and rejoicing and hoping.

So, with apologies to Mr Auden . . . I've reworked his poem . . .

Start the clocks chiming, pick up the phone
Surprise the dog with a big juicy bone
Open the pianos and bang on the drum
Send out the word, let the revelers come.

Let aeroplanes soar, crisscrossing the skies
Scribbling on blue the message: He is alive!
Put gold crowns on the heads of the grey public doves
Let the traffic policemen wear white cotton gloves

He is my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
He gave up his life but now it goes on.

The stars all proclaim it, yes every one,
Aim for the moon and welcome the sun,
Dive in the oceans and treasure the wood;
For life now will always, *always* come good.

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