

ST MARY-THE-VIRGIN, KENTON: LENT & EASTERTIDE COURSE 2008

Foundations of Faith – Programme Three: Sin & Reconciliation

Unit Four: Resurrection & Ascension

Objective for this session

- To understand why the Resurrection is central to the Christian Faith, and central to our discipleship

Starter questions

- What do you most remember about the Easter Vigil?
- What do you most remember from the Gospel accounts of the resurrection

The Gospel Accounts (eg, Luke 24:1–12)

- similarities and differences
 - similarities
 - women
 - before or at dawn
 - Angels / young men
 - no witnesses to the Resurrection itself
 - differences
 - Mary Magdalene is alone in John 20:1–9, *cf.* with one or more others
 - one angel (Matthew, Mark) or two (Luke, John)
 - Christ directs the apostles to Galilee (Matthew) or the Angels do so (Mark)
 - various post-Resurrection appearances (eg, Emmaus) are unique to Luke
 - the differences are essentially of detail rather than substance – the tomb was empty – there had been a physical resurrection – not a 'spiritual' or 'metaphorical' one (liberals / secularists), nor just a waking from a coma (eg, Muslim view)
- Attacks on the Resurrection and the empty tomb
 - Matthew 28:11–15 – the soldiers had been given money to say that the Apostles had stolen the body while they were sleeping – despite great emphasis on the placing of the guard at Matthew 27:62–66
 - “and this is the story amongst the Jews to this day”, and indeed many others in some form
- BUT if not true ...
 - why choose women as first witnesses – hardly going to advance the cause of your deceit to choose those not reliable as witnesses in law as witnesses to the Resurrection
 - although plenty on non- and anti-Christian doubts exist about the Resurrection, there is no significant tradition of the body being elsewhere
 - why early insistence on the historical fact and physical nature of the Resurrection?
 - the 'grilled fish incident' Luke 24:36–43 – he is not a ghost or phantom or projection
 - possible quote from an early Creed at 1 Corinthians 15:3–7
 - why are disciples portrayed as initially sceptical?

'What' was resurrected and ascended?

- what was the nature of Christ's spiritual body?
 - the Incarnation means that God's saving action must involve the physical world
 - the Risen Lord must be the man from Nazareth
 - it has to be an objective reality – the Catholic Creeds and Luke 24:36–43
- Gospels do not imply that Jesus was restored to his previous earthly life – he appears and disappears instantaneously, and is not obstructed by locked doors (John 20:19) – not material in the conventional sense
- BUT – Thomas puts his hand into the wounds of the Passion; the Risen Jesus eats fish, emphasising the physicality of the Resurrection; he walks to Emmaus
- Stanley Hauwerwas – 'The Christian Faith may shape the material conditions that make what Christians

mean by physics quite different from what physics might mean if it is produced by someone who does not share our faith.'

- we cannot know how the Resurrection happened in scientific terms, any more than we can for the Incarnation – they are mysteries of Faith

What is the significance of the Resurrection

- it is as (more?) vital to the Faith as the Incarnation – no Resurrection = the Christian Faith is not true (1 Corinthians 15:12–21)
- Christ is the first fruits of the Resurrection – as in Adam all die, in Christ all are raised to life
- Christmass gets more attention than Easter, but Easter is the Christian festival. Augustine – 'We are the Easter people and our sing is alleluia!' not 'we are the Christmass people and our song is Jingle Bells'
- The Eucharist is the Easter Sacrament, closely linked in the notion of sacrifice and redemption with death and resurrection – why it is important for catholic Christians to have a Requiem Mass
 - who is the funeral for?
 - protestants and liberals regard it as being for the bereaved – no prayer for the soul
 - catholics / orthodox regard it as primarily for the deceased although a source of consolation and hope

Celebration of Easter – the Christian Festival

- Easter (as it is called in English) takes its name from a pagan goddess – in keeping with the long-established Tradition of the Church to overwrite pagan festivals and terms by redefining them
- BUT the proper name for 'Easter' is the Pasch – from the Hebrew word for Passover – *pesach*
- all parts of the Triduum are important – it is not good enough to have the celebration of Easter without the pain of Good Friday
- The Vigil & First Mass of Easter (should really be 'early in the morning on the first day of the week' not late in the evening on the last day of the week – starts in darkness and ends in the New Day
 - New Fire and Service of Light: 'The Light of Christ'
 - the Exsultet – song of praise and celebration
 - the seven Old Testament readings tracing Salvation history, Easter is the culmination
 - Christ's Baptism and Resurrection linked in the New Testament Reading
 - the Gospel account of the Resurrection
 - Water in font is blessed, dipping Paschal Candle
 - Baptism and Confirmation follow – Easter (and Pentecost) are the season of Christian Initiation
- Resurrection is the new Passover – Christ passed through the waters of death to New Life as Israelites passed through the waters of the Red (Reed) Sea to escape Egypt and progress towards Promised Land
- Resurrection is why we move the Paschal candle next to the coffin at a funeral

Date of Easter

- calculated according to lunar dates, as is Passover. Because the Gregorian and Julian calendars are different, Easter in East and West can fall on the same day, but also can fall up to five weeks apart
- earliest possible is March 21st; latest is April 25th