



SAINT LUKE'S

"UPRISING"

EASTER DAY

ACTS 10:34-43

PSALM 118

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

JOHN 20:1-18

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

APRIL 1, 2018

There is no description of the moment of Resurrection in the gospels. We are left to imagine it. Most early Christian art depicts the Resurrection after it happens, often in imagery borrowed from Empire. The risen Christ stands holding a chi rho standard, a Cross, like a flag of victory in battle. If you were raised in the Western Christian tradition, something like this may be your image of Jesus' Resurrection.

However, there are other traditions that open onto different worlds. Some of those traditions are visible within the ones we think we know. Matthew tells us that the guards witness something – but they are bribed to lie, to say the disciples came and took the body while they were sleeping.¹ Then there are the writings that didn't make it into our official Scriptures. The Gospel of Peter says the guards actually *saw* the Resurrection.² This tradition survives in some early art. The guards see the tomb bursting open from the inside. Rays of light hit the guards. They are thrown back, covering their faces from an explosion of light.

There are other places where we read strange things. Matthew again: *The tombs were also opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.*³ We don't know quite what to do with that - to our modern ears it sounds like zombie apocalypse. Yet the Gospel of Nicodemus says something similar.⁴ What the early Christians are trying to tell us is that something else happens as Jesus rises. An astonishing thing: *All* the dead are raised with Jesus. We mention Christ's descent among the dead in the Creeds (it came to be

¹ Matthew 27:62-66; Matthew 28:11-15

² Gospel of Peter 9:35-40

³ Matthew 27:52-53

⁴ Why do you marvel at the resurrection of Jesus? What is marvelous is not that he arose but that he did not rise alone, that he raised many other dead ones who appeared to many in Jerusalem. Gospel of Nicodemus 17, late 600s

called the harrowing of hell), but we have not put it at the center of Easter in the West. Perhaps we should. A journalist might say we have buried the lede.

Paul writes: *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*⁵ Paul grasps this, that Christ is the Second Adam who reverses the Fall, undoing death for all people. There are in fact places in Paul's letters where translation has been biased. Where Paul writes that Jesus is revealed to be Son of God by his own resurrection from the dead, the Greek should be translated: *by the resurrection of the dead ones.*⁶ The proof of Christ's divinity shifts from "Christ being raised from the dead" to "Christ raising the dead ones". Startling.

Jesus raising all the dead *is* the resurrection event. This is the vision of Resurrection that the East never lost.⁷ (If you want to learn more I heartily recommend John Dominic Crossan's new book *Resurrecting Easter*) In the Eastern churches, Resurrection is Anastasis. Anastasis means *uprising* (Greek: *ana*-up; *stasis* – rising). Uprising from Hades, the place of all the dead. Before there was a doctrine of hell as a place of torment, it was simply Hades, the place of unconsciousness in Greco-Roman mythology. Hades is dark and confined and below ground.

In the Anastasis, Jesus goes to Hades, takes Adam's right hand in his own and leads him and Eve out of captivity. In some images, Adam is being helped up from a kneeling, subservient posture, and usually out of his casket. Jesus makes humanity stand upright again, raising us up

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

⁶ Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:12,13,21,42

⁷ See John Dominic Crossan's "Resurrecting Easter"

to his own immortality and freedom, restoring our original image and likeness to God. The Uprising is a universal resurrection, it is our uprising. All humanity is liberated from dark prisons and unconsciousness by Jesus. To make this extra clear, in later images of Resurrection, Christ looks out at us, the viewer, as he pulls Adam and Eve from their graves. As if to say to us not simply “This is *for* you” but “This is *you*.”

A family member once asked me: “Maybe I can believe in the resurrection of Jesus but does that mean me too?” It does. Anastasis means exactly that. Some ancient manuscripts of the great Easter hymn (the Exsultet) that we sang last night show the resurrection taking place in the same church where the service is happening – in real time.⁸ Not in Jerusalem at the site of Jesus’ tomb but in the church you are in now. Time with God is always now. Resurrection is happening here and now.

Perhaps we should say Happy Uprising instead of Happy Easter today. Little children understand the joy of Easter in Easter egg hunts and the Easter bunny. God delights in all our joys at every age. But let us remember that the deepest joy of this day is as grown up as it gets - our own uprising from our own grave. *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

Jesus’ resurrection and yours and mine are inseparable. Alleluia!

AMEN

⁸ Eg. Exsultet MSS in Rylands library, Manchester University, UK, 10th -11th century, cited Crossan opp.cit

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