

Sermon

Luke 24.1-12

That Jesus rose from the dead is to the majority of people in England something that is somewhere on a spectrum between unlikely to inconceivable.

In reply, those of us who are believers, tend to adopt a defensive approach. Our tactic is to employ subtlety and sophistication.

So, when we consider an account of the resurrection like today's from Luke, we draw attention to its ambiguous features. We are mindful, for example, that despite their grief, it is the women who tell the male disciples of their discovery.

I mention this not to dismiss such aspects of the story of the resurrection of Jesus - they add compelling depth that many of us find satisfying - but to draw attention to the words ascribed to the mysterious me who appear in the passage.

'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.'

There is no clever talk here: there is a straightforward explanation of how matters lie. Jesus, horribly and unjustly killed, is risen from death.

That is the heart of the Christian faith. While other aspects of Christianity are fundamental: such as creation and the love of God, the resurrection is even more significant.

It is the resurrection that gives substance to our faith. The resurrection means that the creation - the belief that there is a purpose and not chance alone - is not futile. The resurrection demonstrates that the love of God is more than a conviction that flies in the face of suffering.

Both those points mean that of all people Christians have insight to deal with the world. Not for a moment should we under-estimate the significance of catastrophe and suffering that characterises so much experience. It is completely facile to do so.

However it is the resurrection of Jesus that gives the basis to our refusal to allow loss and pain to have the last word.

Sometimes the things that trouble us swirl around us in a maelstrom. Some of our troubles arise out of nature, some directly from our human failures. Either way the issue of what is just arises. In the case of undeserved suffering - natural disaster and illness are examples - the question of justice arises most easily: why has disaster overtaken the innocent? But even in the case of the troubles that beset us because of our sins, it is *the resurrection that enables us to see that such evil is not the last word.*

In the midst of darkness, our hope that it is not overwhelming is ours ... because of the resurrection.

This is what Easter offers to us. However there is more. While we know the outcome of Peter's doubt, the passage ends with the outcome unclear. Peter, we are told, "went home, amazed at what had happened." From that arises the question of "so what". What would happen next. This is where we stand. The knowledge of Easter is not an end in itself, but a question.

If that happened ... what next? To what does it lead?