

Easter Sunday 5th April'15

Jesus is alive: he is risen from the dead. This is the message of Jesus' disciples. This is the message of the gospels, the New Testament and of the Christian Church.

Some had hoped to kill off both *Jesus and his notion of New Covenant* that he brought with him. Some had hoped to prove that his way of *love and forgiveness* never got anyone anywhere: his bloody death should make that clear to all.

Some had hoped that his new - and unwelcome interpretation of the Law of Moses and his disregard of the traditions of the Temple would convince all others that God judges against Jesus and all such religious radicals.

Some had hoped - and understandably so - that the death of Jesus would be the end of his message, his teaching and his following.

And they thought that his death, along with a stone rolled over the entrance to his tomb, with a Roman guard or two, armed with swords (and perhaps a spear) would ensure that Jesus & his message would stay dead. He was very dead!

After several attempts the Jewish authorities had got their man. They had pursued Jesus of Nazareth on some *trumped up charge*. From that they had pressed for a guilty verdict to be delivered. They then demanded the death penalty and crucifixion. With that completed they then pursued his dead body to the grave - and saw to it that his tomb was guarded. Only now was it safe to say: "IT'S OVER"! If need be the Temple authority could further pursue Jesus' followers if they persisted, but that wouldn't be necessary (Zech. 13:7) "Kill the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered..." IT WAS OVER. How mightily relieved Caiaphas the High Priest and the Temple priests must have been. Jesus had been a right thorn in the flesh.

The disciples, Gospel writers and other New Testament writers wanted to tell of Jesus: of his life and ministry, but words failed them. As the saying goes, 'a picture paints a thousand words', so the disciples and writers give us pictures, glorious pictures that tell us of their experience of Jesus. How would you have told of Jesus? They did a grand job, leaving us some very powerful images like **the transfiguration**. This would tell us not of Jesus glowing for a few minutes but of the way they saw Jesus: this would tell of the way they saw and experienced him not on one occasion but *all the time*. This was what it was like to be in his presence. Jesus outshone Moses – who had shone on Mt. Sinai. The disciples share their wonder at this, that we too might wonder. This picture sincerely conveys to us what it was like to be in the presence of Jesus anywhere and always.

They give us a picture of **Jesus feeding 5,000** in the way that Elijah had previously fed a multitude. If Jesus outshone Moses he had to out shine Elijah too. Jesus' miracles had to be bigger, bolder and more spectacular - and they were. Jesus fed not just a multitude he fed 5,000 men (not counting women and children). The disciples give us pictures of Jesus: real and true pictures of who Jesus was and what he was like. What was Jesus like? He was like this!

These are not Photoshop altered images or fake pictures. These pictures accurately tell us who Jesus was and what Jesus was like. He fed the soul like no other. If Moses offered heavenly manna, Jesus was the manna, the bread of heaven. Jesus offered God's word to the people like no other ever had before. He told of God's love as one who had authority as one who knew God and knew what he was talking about.

If Moses parted the water then Jesus could **walk on the water**. Jesus was declared by the disciples as the one to be listened to and the one to be followed. Some of this is lost on us Gentiles, but for the reading or listening Jews the point was clear, deadly clear. And this kind of

message as deadly! They were declaring the prophet from Nazareth to be greater than the Great Lawgiver Moses. In Jesus they saw something unique, something awesome, something utterly godly, in Jesus they saw God. This is who and what we are to see in each of their pictures.

Jesus could walk on water and he could **calm the life-threatening storms at sea** – all of nature obeys him. Only the gods have power over nature yet the wind and waves obey Jesus. With these images the disciples and New Testament writers are leading us to consider what we see.

On one occasion where Jesus forgives sins the cry that is raised is “blasphemy – only God can forgive sins.” Why have the disciples included this picture of Jesus forgiving sins? To show to us how they saw Jesus. This was how they saw him: and how they would introduce him to us... that we might see him as they did. What is this image designed to say to us?

If Moses and Elijah were a shadow of what was to come where Elijah did not die and Moses' body was never found then Jesus could not die but had to be like the greats of the faith - *or greater*. Why would they follow a 'lesser' prophet? Jesus had to be greater. “This is my beloved son, listen to him – let the others pale.”

That death could not hold Jesus has many meanings. While I like the notion that death could not hold him I also like the notion that the darkness could not extinguish his light or that love never ends. The images the writers give us of Easter are among the best of all – they of course use the old language of sacrifice, as this is their language, this was their (and every culture's) theology they knew no other. Many Christians would no longer want to speak of God needing a blood sacrifice (a human sacrifice) in order to be appeased, placated or conditioned to forgive. We have to be careful what we say about sacrifice with reference to God, especially in relation to God's love as 'unconditional', and to God's amazing grace as offered 'undeservedly'.

From the darkness of the cross **Jesus forgives**. For me this is the very heart and meaning of the Gospel, the New Covenant and the Kingdom of God. From the horror of the cross Jesus continues to love and continues to forgive.

From the hellish pain and anguish of the cross Jesus still reveals God as he knows him, in love and forgiveness.

Hatred and evil and death cannot swallow up, love – the resurrection tells us that *love is stronger than hatred, evil and death*. It is the love of God that is vindicated in resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is a much-photographed event and thankfully the disciples and writers give us many angles on it. What angles have you appreciated?

The love of God revealed in Jesus and offered to all is not dead; **God is not dead**; love has not been snuffed out; this is our triumphant day: Jesus is alive.