

Christoph Lindner: Resurrection People

Talk given at the Easter Family Service on Sunday 17 April 2022

Today I would like us to remember two words: MEET JESUS.

That's at the heart of Easter – 2000 years ago and today.

200 years ago a movement started to remove the supernatural elements from Christianity, to make it more palatable to modern minds. And so reports of Jesus' death and resurrection, were re-interpreted as parables. "Doesn't nature teach us that after winter comes spring? We can discover life lessons in the legend of Easter", they said.

My father was a protestant minister in Germany when this trend still held sway. He was called a naive theologian by some of his colleagues and it wasn't meant as a compliment!

But the friends of Jesus were naive theologians! They had lost all hope because their master and friend Jesus had died. No high-minded legend of his resurrection would have changed their lives in such a way that they gave their life to tell others about the hope we have in Jesus! The only thing that could have made the change is this: They met Jesus after his resurrection, and then they were filled with the power of Jesus when the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. MEET JESUS!

And if this Easter story is true, it has the utmost relevance for *our* journey. Let's unpack just two aspects.

1 The resurrection gives us an unshakeable sense of love and belonging.

Brene Brown shot to fame with a TED talk in 2010 which has been viewed more than 57 million times. In that talk about the power of vulnerability, she says this:

“Connection is why we’re here. Neurobiologically, that’s how we’re wired”

She continues: “People who have a strong sense of love and belonging believe they are worthy of love and belonging.”

Imagine you could meet Jesus today. He is standing right in front of you, calling you by your name and saying: “Do not be afraid”, just as in our gospel reading. Imagine his eyes beaming with love and delight for ... you.

You *can* meet Jesus today because he is ... alive.

John’s Gospel says that the word who spoke life into being became a human being. God makes himself so vulnerable that in Jesus he becomes one of us, dies for all the God-forsakenness and then rises from the dead, meets his friends again, speaks to them, even allows doubting Thomas to put his fingers in the marks of the nails.

Today Jesus is saying to you: “This is how much I love ... you.”

Tim Keller writes: “Perhaps the most ordinary daily benefit of the resurrection is this: To follow not a dead, revered teacher but rather a risen Lord, is to have him actually with us.” Meet Jesus!

2 The resurrection gives us unshakeable hope and purpose in the face of despair and death.

As human beings we tend to swing between despair about the state of the world and a hope that we can create heaven on earth in our own strength.

In 2017 Yuval Harai wrote his bestseller *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. In it he argues that in ancient times human beings turned to God or to gods only because they did not have control over the world in which they lived. But we have that control now. Humanity now is God. We are our own hope for the future, our own God.

Well, only five years later, pessimism about the future for our children and society has returned and deepened. A recent poll in Germany shows that only 20 percent are optimistic about the future, a collapse of hope not seen before by that polling organisation.

Our deepest fears about the future are ultimately connected with our fear of death.

The Bible calls Jesus the first-born from the dead, implying that there would be many others. When his friends are terrified by Jesus' announcement that he will soon die, he replies: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the father except through me." And to Martha Jesus says at the grave of her brother Lazarus, "Those who believe in me will live, even when

they die.” And that’s not pie in the sky because it gives us the confidence to live our lives courageously, rather than defensively and anxiously.

Yes, we thank God for the advances of medicine that have added years to our lives. Without them I most likely wouldn’t be standing here today. Without them we couldn’t celebrate Easter today in a full church, thanks to the rapid vaccine roll-out.

We are trying desperately to add years to our life, to postpone the inevitable. But the message of Easter adds life to our years, adds purpose to our days. And then adds endless years to our life in God’s presence.

Tim Keller writes: “The risen Lord Jesus will return and take his throne, and everything sad will come untrue. We will see him face to face finally. And he is calling us today to take part in a great campaign of sabotage against the forces of darkness. We are not only free, but freedom fighters, in service of our risen Lord and King.”

I have met Jesus in people such as our very good friend, who passed away yesterday. It had a certain poignancy for us that he died on Holy Saturday - between Jesus’ death and resurrection. He came to a living faith in Jesus when he asked his local vicar to baptise his child. The vicar said “I’d love to do that. But don’t you owe it to yourself to explore the Christian faith and the person of Jesus at the same time?” He did that and met Jesus. Later he sold his business, was trained as a minister in the Church of England and over the last 25 years or so has led dozens of Alpha courses. On several occasions he said that one of his sadnesses

was that no-one introduced him to Jesus earlier. But he made his years count and it was his heart's desire that others would meet Jesus in the same way he had.

I have met Jesus in people like him. I have met Jesus in the pages of the Bible. I have met Jesus in the community of the family of Jesus - the church. I pray that in a small way people will meet Jesus in me. And I will meet Jesus face-to-face, one day, only God knows when.

Meet Jesus ... this Easter.

You can start this journey with a simple prayer:

“Jesus, I want to meet you. Thank you that you love me. Thank you that you died for me. Thank you that you rose again. The door of my life is wide open. Please, come in. Amen”

If you have prayed this prayer, I'd love to encourage you in your next steps with Jesus. Please get in touch with me at rector@denhamparish.church

“Resurrection People” is our Easter season theme. You can order a booklet with weekday reflections here:

<https://engageworship.org/store/product/resurrection-people-personal-devotions>



www.denhamparish.church/new