

Easter Day 2008
St Peter's Box Hill

EASTER RHYTHMS

I recently read of a little boy going home from Easter Services saying to his mother. "You know Mum, I learned a new song in Church today." "Oh," she said; "what is it."

"It's Jesus Christ has rhythm today."

Well you can sense a fresh surging rhythm about our faith today. Over the past three days we have passed through an amazing range of human emotions and experiences from the Last Supper, a new way of leadership, the struggle with the isolation of betrayal, trial and seemingly defeat. The

Then this morning in the great Liturgy of Easter we traced through the transformation of defeat both in the history of the people of God and heard the first declarations of the Easter Rhythm in the Sacrament of Baptism, Confirmation and Reaffirmation when Marny "Yes" to God and to Christ. We come today with Alleluias, the great affirmation "The Lord is risen; He is risen indeed."

There is an Easter Rhythm inviting each of us to join in its flow and dynamic and life.

But all this enthusiasm cannot mask the questions a day like this has to raise.

Twenty-one years ago I spent my only Easter away from Australia in Toronto. My Canadian Cousin whom I met for the first and only time met me at my hotel after I had been to Church.

After a while said; "Do you believe all this Easter stuff.?" I asked "what of you?" He replied, "Things don't work that way. Maybe Christians are just making it up."

My guess is that in spite of the spiritual energy of this morning, his words may speak for many people - including some within this congregation. Many find it difficult to see what the meaning of this day is for them

However I always discern a ring of truth or authenticity in the gospel accounts of Easter Day. The very difference in detail in the four gospel accounts of Easter only confirms that these accounts

are not fabrications or concocted stories - but the integrity and reality of the events. Certainly the early Church had adequate opportunities to straighten out the differences in the interest of getting the stories straight.

The gospel this morning has several dimensions of the Easter Rhythm that still resonate with the music of our souls today. Easter Rhythm is

(1) ABOUT THE MOVEMENT FROM FEAR TO FAITH.

The Fourth Gospel which is the reading this morning is brutally honest about the disciples first reactions to the Easter event. For Peter and John there appear to be no angels to announce the news of resurrection. No evidence save that of the empty tomb. The effect of this on Peter is not noted in the text but its impact on John the beloved disciple is clear " he saw and believed."

There is only the stark emptiness of the tomb and the tell tale presence of Jesus abandoned burial clothes, yet he believes.

As Gail O Day asks in her fascinating commentary on John's Gospel; "How can the evidence of an empty tomb lead to faith? In what may sound like a theological tautology, the beloved disciple believed because he already believed. That is, John believed in Jesus and the trustworthiness of his promises about himself and God. When he saw the empty tomb he knew what it signalled, that Jesus had conquered death. The beloved disciple did not know at this stage what form Jesus conquest of death had taken; he did not know how Jesus conquest would be manifest among the living; he did not even know for a start how to speak about what had happened. All he knew was that the burial cloths told him that Jesus defeated death." (New Interpreters Bible.)

Contrary to many contemporary theologians I believe that stories of the empty tomb can present us with the crux of resurrection faith. Whether to believe in Jesus defeat of death without corroborating evidence, without the experience of visits with the risen Jesus. Later on in this chapter of the gospel, John and the other disciples are faced with the presence of the risen Christ who appeared to them and spoke with them. At this stage of Easter morning, John is the model for us who do not have these appearances. A person

who believes before he receives corroboration. In fact that is how it usually works for most of us even now.

Sometimes folk want me to prove the reality of Easter or indeed God. While I believe the Christian faith has sound rational reasons undergirding its reality, ultimately I cannot prove it. In fact if I could prove it there would be no need for faith.

I have found that when we consider the reasons and then take that final leap of faith - which sometimes is more a hop and a step rather than a long jump - confirmation or assurance comes.

The Easter rhythm is an invitation to faith - a faith that is ready to take the risk of responding to an empty tomb before it sees the risen Lord.

Such a step can appear scary - scary in the demands it places upon us. Yet paradoxically rather than being scary such a faith response leads to the defeat of fear that can cripple and paralyse our emotions, body and soul. Much later in the New Testament there appear these dynamic words

"There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out all fear."

Easter faith is the key that opens the door to the presence and indeed the possibility of such love in our lives.

Easter rhythm is also

(2) ABOUT RESURRECTION.

The latter part of the Gospel reading this morning describes the joy and delight of Mary Magdalene's recognition of the Risen Jesus. It is all too easy to place that recognition back there and fail to see its significance for us now. Such recognition is more than a personal spiritual experience because it has profound implications for the way we see life, society and the world.

Once the disciples recognise the reality of resurrection, the whole way they had seen the world was blown away. That is why they soon retreat back into their fears behind locked doors, and need further signs of Christ's resurrection.

If Jesus was back, if death couldn't seal tombs anymore, and evil could not have the last word, then anything is possible.

Watching a Television debate a week ago indicates that many people in society really believe that this is a closed world where survival is the dominant philosophy. One economic commentator recently claimed that the market - that sacred cow which dominates our community and its leaders- is basically governed by the two emotions of greed and fear. Both of these are fundamentally attitudes of scarcity - that there isn't really enough to go around, so I had better get what I can and soon.

That view can run a stock market through the ceiling or down into the basement and in the process ruin and wreck people's lives. As for the problems in the world, well they are part of this closed world too.

Too little public housing? - It's just the downside of a boom economy. Can't help it.

Hunger? You will never solve that - too big.

The chasm between rich and poorer nations, that vast third world debt crippling countries and starving people. Well a debt is a debt and countries like Australia are too small to make any significant difference. And so it goes on.

Well if our world is closed where nothing new that will change these dilemmas can happen, if Jesus is safely buried in the tomb, then nothing much can ever really happen. The wealthy can enjoy their capital gains and leave things as they are.

But if Jesus is raised from the dead, then all bets are off. Easter then is not simply a metaphor for new life and new beginnings.

Easter declares that the God who created heaven and earth is capable of a new creation, taking the broken pieces and closed tombs of our world and making something new of them.

No wonder the other gospels portray the woman running away from the resurrection in terror. If that kind of power is at work in the universe, then we can never give up on anything.

If Jesus is raised from the dead we cannot stay in our closed tombs forever.

We can't let tough problems define us - a broken relationship, or a troubled child, or a long struggle with depression, or the tough

odds that often come with trying to grow up as Aboriginal Australians when the white majority calls all the shots. No tombs are sealed. None.

You see, there is a rhythm of Jesus Christ risen today.

It is the rhythm of death and resurrection, of refusing to avoid the dead places in us and in our world, and instead facing them, going through them trusting that the One who raised Jesus, will raise us too.

As Sloane Coffin once put it; " Christ is risen to convert us, not from life to something more than life; but from something less than life to the possibility of full life itself."

Christ's resurrection he wrote "(promises) to put love into our hearts, decent thoughts into our heads and a little more iron in our spines."

The reality for the disciples on that first Easter day is exactly the same for us today.

If Jesus was back, then they could not declare themselves victims and hide away behind locked door for fear. If the tomb isn't the end, if God will stop literally at nothing, even death, to keep working on this frightened, self-centred world, then our only choice is fully to live.

Wish fulfilment? It doesn't look like that to me. My guess is that the real wish, and the one plenty of people have bet on, is that Jesus is safely in the ground, that there is really no reason to hope, so they can get on with their driven frightened ways.

A dead Jesus is a lot more manageable, predictable than the risen and living Christ. While he was in the tomb we thought we knew where he was. We thought we knew how life worked out.

But the Lord is risen, the Lord is risen indeed.

I cannot finish without speaking of the resurrection hope in death.

Perhaps over the past year some of you have experienced the death of a loved one or friend. I too can share that experience with you. Sometimes folk can get into a dreadful fix and see death as the end. How can a person who has been cremated come back to life/

Our confusion is because we can only think in terms of the physical.

The resurrection hope declares that Jesus' resurrection is the first fruits of those who have died. The new resurrection body of Jesus was not simply his physical body resuscitated. It is a new body no longer bound by this world of time and space. It speaks of a transphysical – trans in the sense of transformed. In the Resurrection appearances of the risen Christ there both points of continuity with the past – it is seen as robustly physical. But also discontinuity in that it is no longer bound by time and space.

A passage from I Corinthians 15 is often read at funerals
"So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in power It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" I Corinthians 15:42-44

To accept the resurrection hope of Jesus "that because I live you shall live also" is to be able to leave our beloved dead in God's keeping. Not bound by a world of time and space.

This Easter morning says that Christ is among us my friends, spreading God's rhythm of resurrection, new life and hope whether in life or death. He is here offering to feed us with the bread and wine of his risen life. He will be in our homes this afternoon and our work this week, opening doors of the tombs that imprison our society and us and inviting us to risk and love. And he will be wherever God's justice and compassion are being served. He will be with us in life and he will be with us in death. That is the Easter rhythm my friends.

The Lord is risen, The Lord is risen indeed. We are invited to watch for the stirring of the rhythm of the Risen Christ, there in the gospels, here in this Eucharist and everywhere in our lives and world.

You see, he is not dead; it is not finished but just beginning.

Alleluia.

Are we ready for the Easter rhythm?