

### **3rd Sunday before Lent 9.30 HC Great Wishford**

1 Corinthians 15.12-20

#### **The Resurrection of the Dead**

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

#### **Luke 6.17-26**

<sup>17</sup> He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>18</sup> They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. <sup>19</sup> And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

<sup>20</sup> Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

‘Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

‘Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice on that

day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

<sup>24</sup> 'But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

<sup>25</sup> 'Woe to you who are full now,  
for you will be hungry.

'Woe to you who are laughing now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

<sup>26</sup> 'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

## **Sermon**

### **The reality of the Resurrection and hope**

I am afraid these days I take rather a lot of funerals, more than baptisms or weddings. It is the calling of living in a benefice that attracts mainly older people to live here. And one thing I notice is how little hope there is at such events. Yes, there is, of course, the sadness and grief of losing somebody who is loved and been part of families for some time. But there is often, an unspoken assumption that death is the end and a life, even if well lived, is over and nothing will follow. This is the lie that has permeated modern society and reason so many find it so hard to talk about death and the end. If you do not believe that there is anything after death, then there is nothing to console or look forward to. There is no hope.

What a contrast to the Christian funerals I have attended or taken, for those who died in the Lord and whose family wished to celebrate, not just the life given, but also the hope of greater glory. For if we as Christians have no hope then what is the point of the gospel? This is the question Paul is addressing in his letter to the Corinthians. He sees the resurrection of Jesus as being the central point in the Gospel. If Christ was not raised from the dead then his ministry is based on a lie, his disciples were misled and Paul himself has wasted his life trying to spread the Good news based on a fabrication.

Paul would have been very aware, being a pharisee by training, that even in Jewish society there were those who staunchly opposed the idea that life

after death was possible. The Sadducees believed that there was nothing more to life than the here and now. That you should live life to the full, enjoy it while you can, for there would be no judgement or anything else after death. I suspect we have a similar feeling in society today.

But Jesus did rise from the dead. His disciples and over 500 witnesses confirm it. Paul himself experienced the risen and ascended Jesus on the road to Damascus and becomes convinced of the resurrection. The resurrection is proof of the divinity of Christ coupled with the authentication of his earthly ministry. Look at the signs Jesus himself laid out during his ministry. Not only did he foretell of his own Resurrection, but he raised others from the dead. There was Jairus's daughter, The son of the widow at Nairn, and most famously his friend Lazarus, who had been dead for three days before being resurrected from the tomb. Jesus is pointing to the power of God over death and the vindication of his ministry.

And yet they did not understand:

To the women standing at the foot of the cross, crucifixion was the end and they later, went to anoint his body. To the disciples, the arrest and crucifixion was the end of the ministry and mission. And both groups who knew Jesus so well during his time on earth, were totally wrong and mistaken. The resurrection stands as the most surprising and important even in the history of humankind. It gives hope and it makes the claim "there are many rooms in my fathers house" believable. Our hope is not based on some mythological tale, or a half chance of perhaps, winning the lottery, but on real substantial, vindicated eyewitness accounts and facts.

### **The resurrection: A crutch?**

Now Christians are often accused of being "Pie in the sky when you die" – comfortable thoughts, to help you deal with the challenges of life. The hope of resurrection is a crutch to help you get through life. And there have been misuses of this aspect of thought in the past. Some have taught "Accept the lot allocated to you today, because you will gain your reward in Heaven". The words mostly now deleted from the hymn "All things bright and beautiful" (incidentally one of the most common hymns at funerals I lead"). You may remember them from childhood:

"The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,

God made them, high or lowly,  
And ordered their estate.”

The Victorian take on knowing your place and keeping to it!

### **Resurrection brings new values**

These words are contrasted with the calling of Christ to a God centred world. The Jesus who spent time with the poor and underprivileged and went out of his way to heal those who were forced into destitution through their diseases. Jesus certainly did not accept the idea that God had made the rich wealthy and the poor lowly, urging the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor.

Christianity lived and embraced properly is no crutch, it is not passive acceptance of the injustice and state of the world. In fact, it is so challenging and demanding, that only with the help of God and the Holy Spirit can we begin. Don't believe me? Go and Love your enemies! The hope of the resurrection should not lead us to vain platitudes or acceptance of social injustice but inspire us to trust God and strive to build his Kingdom here on Earth.

That is what our gospel reading challenges us with. Sometimes called the beatitudes, it represents one of the biggest counter cultural expressions of faith ever recorded. It stresses the blessing of God will fall on those who are poor, hungry, mourning, disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Jesus speaks of the time when their situations will be reversed, because God favours those who have been disregarded by society.

It is because of this upside-down set of values: God values not human values of honouring success, money and power. Christians are called to live in the world but not of the world. Our standards should be those of Jesus. We need to be very wary of falling into the trap of honouring that which human society. That is not to say all aspects of society are bad, indeed there are many good organisations and arrangements, but we need to fix our eyes on the teaching and person of Jesus to determine what is best and how we should live.

We should be people of hope. Hope generated by the resurrection of Jesus. The hope of God's kingdom here on Earth and the hope of eternal life. For we have faith and in the words of Hebrews 1: “Now faith is confidence in

what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see”. Or as Jesus said: <sup>2</sup>‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup>Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven’. Hope in the kingdom of God based on the resurrection.