

Easter Day 2016 Calling on the Risen Jesus
Luke 24:1-11 Acts 10:34-43 Julian Templeton
Pond Square Chapel, United Reformed Church, Highgate

Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, come and bring us life.

We need the life of the risen Jesus, not least because, as the events in Brussels in the past week have reminded us, there are those who believe they can achieve their aims by causing indiscriminate death and destruction. If those who caused this are adherents of Islam, and it is a big 'if', then Islam has a massive challenge to explain the reasons for such violent and destructive behaviour. Arguably, Belgium has an even bigger challenge to investigate why some of its own citizens have become so alienated that they seem regard their fellow citizens as collateral damage on the way to achieving their aim. We in the UK, along with other European nations, arguably need to ask ourselves similar questions.

It is when we begin to ask ourselves questions about the value of life and that which threatens it that Christians ought naturally to focus on the event that has transformed our attitude to life and to death: the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

'Why search among the dead for one who is alive?'
Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be given into the hands of sinners and be crucified, and must rise again on the third day.'

Luke 24:5-7

These are the words spoken by two men in dazzling garments to the women who have come to anoint Jesus's body but find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. The women depart from the tomb, they report to the 11 disciples and the

others what they had seen and heard. But to those who heard this report "...the story appeared to them to be nonsense, and they would not believe them." Luke 24:11

If we had been with those first disciples, we too might have had the same reaction. We know from personal experience that people who die do not come alive again. Wishing that they would come alive again does not alter the finality of death. But everything changes for the incredulous disciples and followers when the risen Jesus encounters two of their number, Cleopas and a companion, on the road to Emmaus. At least, they recognise it is the risen Jesus only when he breaks bread and offers it to them: "...then their eyes were opened and they recognized him." Luke 24:31

By the time we get to the second part of Luke's work, the Acts of the Apostles, Peter, who initially was one of those who thought the women's story was nonsense, has himself been encountered by the risen Jesus and has been called by him to proclaim the gospel. In our second reading we are given an account of what Peter preached:

They put [Jesus] to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen in advance by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. Acts 10:39-42

Responding to the call of the risen Jesus has changed Peter, and it will change us if we will let it. Central to responding to that call is the act of repentance. Repentance is when we call

on God for his help. When we repent, we acknowledge that our best efforts to earn God's favour, and our best efforts to push God away, have been failures. All our attempts to live without God have failed to bring us the fulfilment for which we yearn. What the Easter story invites us to do is to call:

Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, come and bring us life

Jesus describes himself in the Gospel According to John as "...the Way, the Truth, and the Life." (John 14:6). George Herbert, in his poem 'The Call', inverts the usual expectations of what calling is. Usually we talk about *Christ's* calling of us. But in Herbert's poem, the focus is on *our* calling upon Jesus Christ. Herbert explores in the first stanza of his poem how we might call upon Jesus as 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life'.

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
such a Way as gives us breath:
such a Truth as ends all strife:
such a Life as killeth death.

First, we call on Jesus to breathe on us the breath of Life. We who are often dispirited by the troubles and vexations of life need Jesus to inspire us. His Spirit is the life giving breath that helps us to follow the way of Jesus. We call on Jesus because we need the Truth. Jesus is God's Word that we can trust. He reveals to us the truth that we are the beloved sons and daughters of God our heavenly Father. That truth sets us free by quelling strife within us and by quelling strife with others. We call on Jesus—who bears God's life that cannot be extinguished—to set us free from the fear of death and give us hope. We who trust in him need not regard death as extinction. Rather, death becomes the doorway through which we follow Jesus into the life God will give.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
such a Light as shows a feast:
such a Feast as mends in length:
such a Strength as makes his guest.

We call on Jesus to give us light. We no longer need to walk in the darkness of self-deception but can walk in the light of honesty. Herbert imagines that the first and main thing that Jesus as light reveals is a *feast!*

Feasts or Festivals regularly punctuate the Church's year. Regrettably, I think the Church has mostly forgotten how to celebrate its feasts and festivals. People need and want to celebrate. People, young people especially, will make great efforts and expend a great deal of money to attend festivals celebrating music and arts and literature and any number of other things. It is an utter indictment on us when you consider that one of the *last* places in which young people will think about celebrating a festival is in the Church! Easter Day is the Church's most important festival and feast because on this day we celebrate that central truth of our faith: that Jesus is risen and as a result we and the world are changed! Let's bring celebration back to its central place in Christian faith and life, not limiting it to singing some hymns and going home again as if nothing has changed. *Everything has changed because Jesus has risen from the dead!* And if everything has changed for us, what is to stop us from dancing and feasting in celebration? I'll tell you what is to stop us: only our lack of imagination and our inhibitions!

Remember that in John's Gospel the very first sign or miracle was at a wedding feast when Jesus turned water into wine, and the steward's amazed exclamation was: "you have saved the

best wine for last!” (John 2:10). The best wine is the abundant grace of God that Jesus brings. Herbert’s line “such a feast as mends in length” is pointing to that wedding feast and to the effect of grace in the life of the Christian: *it gets better and better as it goes on*. And you can be sure that that wedding feast got better and better as it went on, almost certainly including dancing! The grace that we receive through Jesus Christ is the *strength* of our life, as the next line makes clear: “such a strength as makes his guest.” This line also suggests a reference to another of Herbert’s poems: *Love (III)*, which begins “Love bade me welcome...” In that poem Christ is Love personified who welcomes us to his feast, but we draw back from his welcome due to a sense of unworthiness. Love, however, reminds us that *he makes us worthy* by his invitation, and that assurance gives us the strength to be his guest at the feast.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
such a Joy as none can move:
such a Love as none can part:
such a Heart as joys in love.

We call upon Jesus to bring us joy. Joy is different from happiness. Happiness is often fleeting, whereas the joy that Jesus brings, the joy of being at peace with God, is deep and endures even through difficulties. It is the joy that none can move. “Such a love as none can part” reminds us that since Jesus is risen “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:39) “Such a heart as joys in love” returns us to the ‘heart of the matter’. Because the risen Jesus is God’s eternal love for us and for the world, we are called to respond wholeheartedly with our answering love.

I invite you to call upon Jesus today by responding to his invitation to the Lord’s Supper. Come with empty hands and open hearts and receive the grace of the risen Jesus in bread and wine.

Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, come and bring us life!