

Resurrection Dance – Easter Vigil Sermons 2015

Alleluia, Christ is Risen. Surrexit Alleluia.

Picture the scene: a middle-aged lady has spent years following faithfully in her master's footsteps. She has travelled all over the globe spreading the Gospel of Christ to different people and nations. She has faced tyrants and chieftains, lords and kings in her bid to reveal the love of Christ to all she meets. After her exile from Jerusalem, where the Christian Church was being persecuted, she finally ends up in modern day France and her journey continues. She becomes an active missionary and preacher, before retiring to a cave and living as a hermit in old age.

It was less than a century after this that Donatello carved a statue of Mary Magdalene in polychrome wood – he casts her as an ascetic hermit, gaunt and old but still on her front foot and full of energy.

The story of Mary Magdalene's missionary endeavours cannot be proven, but there is evidence to suggest that Mary did die in France. The only other evidence we seem to have of her life after Jesus' resurrection is the statue that Donatello carved of her. Her relics are now placed in various chapels dedicated to her name – many in France itself. But, the details are not important, because the overarching rhythm of this story fits perfectly with what we know of her from the Gospel accounts.

We know that Mary was often one of the first people to recognise Christ – she was the first person through her actions to show how Christ's teaching had positively affected her. We know that she was attentive to His teaching and dedicated to His cause. We know that she followed Him to the cross and then was the first person to see Him rise. We know that Mary left the tomb and the place where she encountered her risen Lord in confusion and joy and went off to tell the other disciples. And the way this story is told, we get the impression that she danced all the way.

If Donatello's depiction of Mary is to be believed, and there is no reason why it shouldn't be, Mary, very advanced in years, could not stop spreading the word of Christ. She could not stop striding, best foot forward, to do the work of her Lord and continue that 'dance' that her Lord called her to. All who recognise the resurrection of Christ end up partaking in this same dance, it would seem.

John, describes the resurrection of Jesus and his appearance to Mary Magdalene so well. But Luke's Gospel tells of another resurrection story detailing the walk to Emmaus. In it we are told of two very solemn fellows making their way to meet their friends. They have dropped their heads in despair and they are dragging their feet, which now feel heavier than ever. It feels to them as if this journey may never end. They had placed such great expectation upon Jesus, he had given such purpose to their lives - and now he was dead and all hope seemed to be lost.

Then they are joined by a person they do not recognise, but they value the opportunity to retell all that they had seen and that Jesus had done. They do not know they are talking to Christ and He does not tell them, because he recognises that they need to be brought slowly towards the truth.

Through the scriptures, He begins to reveal to them the true interpretation of recent events. We now begin to get a sense that the two followers are becoming less morose and despairing. By the time they reach their destination, the two disciples are positively dancing, and yet they still do not recognise that it is the risen Christ who has done this for them. Only when Christ shares the Eucharist with them do they recognise Christ for who he truly is. And with that Christ departs from them, leaving them to perform the dance He has given them to do - job done!

But, of course, the dance does not stop there. This dance continues with us today. Every Sunday morning in our Eucharistic celebration, the risen Christ continues to make himself known to us, just as he did to his disciples at the end of the Emmaus road. And having shared His divine offering with Him, we then depart to continue His dance in the here and now. Everyone is invited to this dance and, long before we recognise the full truth of the resurrection for ourselves, we begin slowly tapping our feet. Then we find ourselves working for the good of others, radiating a joy and a loving kindness that is difficult to characterise. We get involved in all kinds of activities on behalf of Christ's Church and we feel a deeper desire to attend divine worship more regularly as the resurrected Christ slowly reveals himself to us, just as he did to those disciples on the road to Emmaus. Our feet stop tapping, just as our bodies begin to groove and bop, sway and rock.

Eventually the truth of the resurrection is revealed to us in all its radiating magnificence. A truth that cannot be explained by human faculties, but which will be revealed at the time of Christ's choosing. It cannot be proven or uncovered by scientific endeavour or empirical evidence, but only through faith, goodwill and the grace of God.

Rather interestingly, recently in Egypt, a group of archaeologists uncovered some of the earliest forms of chocolate in a tomb of one of the great Egyptian Pharaohs. Until this find, it was considered that chocolate, in the form that we have it today, was a relatively recent invention.

An example of this chocolate find can now be seen in the British Museum. They have called it Pharaoh Rocher.

Ecclesiastes tells us that 'there is nothing new under the sun'. And every time we forget this pearl of wisdom we are brought back down to earth with a bump. Christ's resurrection is as real today as it was 2000 years ago and it will continue to be true 2000 years from now. Doubt and scepticism cannot change that. Christ is the Lord of the dance and He calls the tune. All we can do is allow ourselves to feel the rhythm.

I will leave you with the words of one of the 20th century's greatest swinging gurus; so in the words of Baloo the bear from Disney's Jungle Book. 'Come on Baggy, get with the beat!'

Amen

R.T. Parker-McGee 2015