

**SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND JONATHAN ANDREW
AT 8 AND 10 AM SERVICES OF HOLY COMMUNION
ON 6 APRIL 2008, THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**

BEING EASTER PEOPLE - 'PROCLAIMING THE RESURRECTION'¹

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Luke 24:13-35

“Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them ...”

Last week in the first of our sermon series “Being Easter People” Adela talked about how central the resurrection is to our entire Christian faith. The resurrection is essential – it shows God’s endorsement of all that Jesus taught and did, and inaugurates the new creation in which we all now stand. Although no-one saw the moment of resurrection itself, for me the strongest evidence for it is that transformation of the lives of the apostles as they set out in witness as men and women reborn.

As Adela said – being an Easter person involves not just saying the right stuff, not just paying lip service to the doctrine, but it’s about doing things – God’s things. So this week I want to think about what this means for us – for all of us here this morning. We have already prayed in our Collect “Risen Christ, you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope: strengthen us to proclaim your risen life” – how do we go about that proclamation?

But be honest - How do you really feel about making that prayer your own? Comfortable are you? Doesn’t feel very Anglican does it? Some of us might be thinking – it’s all right for those evangelicals from the Living Water fellowship, and the Baptists, but it’s not quite our thing! Perhaps depressing and embarrassing images of people trying to gather children to sing hymns on seaside beaches float into our minds – isn’t that sort of evangelism all a bit counterproductive? If we Anglicans do evangelism at all, shouldn’t we leave it to the clergy? After all, Nick and Jonathan have presumably been trained to stick their necks out and talk about God – and if someone is tempted (when they do stick their necks out) to chop their heads off, well Nick and Jonathan have got those sturdy plastic collars to protect them!

And, although in our reading from Acts, Peter gave us a pretty clear role model of standing up and speaking out, I think it is not unreasonable to question whether his approach would work in today’s context – however brilliant an orator you may be, standing on the steps of Westminster Abbey and haranguing passers-by about their failings would probably not result in swarms of people asking for immediate baptism – more likely the police would scoop you up to check your shoes for plastic explosives, rapidly followed by men in white coats with sedatives.

And yet, I do not think that lets us off the hook. We have to ask ourselves (all of us have to ask ourselves) whether people know that we are followers of Christ, and that the fact of his resurrection has made a difference in our lives. One of the clearest

¹ This sermon is the second in our post-Easter series, “Being Easter People”.

instructions in the New Testament is Jesus' parting words to his disciples (and therefore to us). At the end of Matthew's gospel he says that we should "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (all peoples), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I (Jesus) have commanded you."² (And please note, Jesus doesn't say this just applies to the clergy, and he doesn't say anything about exempting us because of our English reserve.)

So do we, as it were, 'come out' as Christians in our everyday lives, or are we a bit coy about it? I remember that while I was waiting to hear whether I would be accepted for ordination training, I was working temporarily as a consultant at one of our major banks. Most people there merely assumed that I was filling in time while waiting for a 'real job' to come up, and I did nothing to tell them otherwise. But finally I had no choice but to tell the chap for whom I was working that I would have to cut down my hours, in order to do some preparatory study before starting at college. I did this in some trepidation, knowing that he was a great gossip, and sure enough within a few hours everyone I'd worked with in Head Office knew what I was up to. But instead of embarrassment, I experienced wonderful support – all sorts of 'closet Christians' emerged from the woodwork, and we'd have interesting chats over the photocopier or around the coffee machine about the relative merits of Alpha and Emmaus courses and so on. What's more, some people who had no explicit faith were intrigued, and this led to some good conversations about the meaning of life. But I could not help feeling it was sad that the significant Christian presence in that place was so invisible. What opportunities had been missed for mutual support and outreach? Even if explicit evangelism was not appropriate or practicable in a modern workplace, if more people had known about us, might not some of them have been led to wonder why this particular group of people was different in some way, and even to wonder if we had something they might want or need in their lives?

But before they could wonder about such things, the question has to be asked, were we so-called Christians different in any real way from all the other 'nice' people in the bank? Today we're talking about proclaiming the resurrection, but proclamation isn't just about declaring that something has happened, it's about moving in the power of the Holy Spirit to make something new happen.

So let's make this personal - what might you do?

- Well, you might be a little firmer in allocating time to God – make more of an effort with your prayer life, try to be in church every Sunday (and on major Holy Days) – and don't be backward in telling friends where your priorities lie – why you're not available on Sunday mornings for golf or shopping – explain your need to give thanks to God, and to be refreshed by word and sacrament to live the resurrection life over the coming week.
- You might be more specific on where your moral judgements come from. If you're passionate about the environment, base your arguments clearly on our

²Matthew 28:19-20.

duty to cherish God's gifts – like Adam to tend his garden.³ If you see unique value in all human life from conception to natural death, explain that you value all people, however inconvenient and unattractive they may be, as made by God in his own image.⁴ And that all this is based on the love of God for all his creation as demonstrated in his resurrection promise.

- You might consider some specific service to your fellow human beings – the young or the old, the sick or the poor – because that's what Jesus has told us to do.⁵
- You might like to pray about whether this is the time for you to explore some form of specifically church-based Christian ministry. A few examples:
 - We still need a press officer to work with Nick to get the Good News into the local papers.
 - The Baptism Team could do with more volunteers to help with the joyful task of welcoming new families into the church.
 - Some male bereavement visitors could do an enormous amount of good in moving bereaved men forward in their hope of new life⁶.

There's plenty to do and Nick and I would be only too delighted to explore possibilities with you.

And, if all that sounds a bit frightening, remember the end of that command I quoted from Matthew – after telling his disciples to make disciples of all nations, Jesus told them “I am with you always, to the end of the age”.⁷ We're not alone in our labours.

And so perhaps standing up preaching is the least important part of proclamation – more often than not, actions speak louder than words - we proclaim our faith in the resurrection when people see where our priorities lie, when they see that we base our decisions on our understanding of the world as God created it to be, when we value our fellow human beings as fellow children of God, and when we serve the church, not because it's the best club in Hersham, but because it's Christ's body on earth.

Because, in our values, in our actions, in our work for others, we show what excites us, what inspires us. When in today's gospel Cleopas and his companion met the risen Christ they were immediately spurred to action – they rushed back to Jerusalem to spread the good news. May that same excitement inspire us in word and in deed.

Amen

³ Genesis 2:15.

⁴ Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 139.

⁵ Matthew 25:31-46.

⁶ At the end of our 10am service, a member of our congregation immediately offered himself for possible involvement in this ministry – but there are still plenty of opportunities!

⁷ Matthew 28:20.