

01 DECEMBER 2024

A Reflection

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## WELCOMING THE SPRING

**Readings: Ecclesiastes 3: 1- 8; Galatians 5: 19 – 15; Matthew 6: 24 – 34**

**The central story at the heart of the Christian faith, is the story of The Resurrection.** Not the story of the miraculous birth at Christmas, nor the story of Jesus' miracles, nor his mission in Galilee.

The central story of the gospels is the Story of the Resurrection and the Empty Tomb. Apart from these central stories, (of the Resurrection& Empty Tomb), the story of Jesus' life is similar to the life stories of other great religious teachers.

Without the story of the resurrection, Jesus' would simply have died and been remembered as another great Rabbi.

Whether you believe in a literal resurrection is almost a moot point – it can neither be proven or disproven, this far from the event.

**What is important about the Resurrection Story, is 'what the Story creates'. It is a story that creates Hope. Undying hope. Hope that, not even death, is able to destroy.**

**The Empty Tomb and the story of the Resurrection tell the faithful that death has not had the final word. That hope is still alive, and that new life awaits those who hope in the Resurrection.**

We read and hear lots of stories or testimonies about people who considered themselves to be dead, until they found new life through faith in Christ.

Some of you may have heard of ex-gang members, or drug addicts, or people living in abusive relationships, who came to faith in Christ when their lives were at their lowest ebb. They couldn't see any hope in the way that they were living, which was a kind of death. The Christian faith has given them hope, and a resurrection. They have moved from death to new life.

One of the things that happens when we commit ourselves to following Christ, is that our lives go through a transformation. We are no longer the people we were, before our commitment to Christ.

To quote Bonhoeffer: “When Christ died for us, he did not just die for our forgiveness; he died to make us new creatures. This new creation is already begun in us now, but it will not be completed until we see him face to face. Just as spring cannot be hurried, neither can the process of being made new.”

Like many of you, I was brought up in the Christian faith. And it didn't mean that much to me, until I made a conscious commitment to follow Christ. I made my commitment at about aged 14, followed by my Confirmation, or 'Profession of Faith' (as they used to call it). Together with others, I professed my faith in Christ in front of our congregation - and stated my intention to follow him with the help of the Holy Spirit. (The Profession of Faith was done mainly through questions, asked by our minister and answers, using a prayer book).

It didn't make me perfect overnight, and in fact I did a lot of things after my confirmation that frankly, weren't 'Christian', but I always found a way back to my 'true north' if you like. And over the years, and through many ups and downs, I believe that my life has been transformed – because of my belief, and my hope in the Resurrection. My life has been resurrected.

**I am typical of many Christians, we're not perfect, but were better than we were. We are a work in transformation.** And whenever my life takes a turn for the worst, I know that my hope in Christ will bring me back on track.

**I remember during my Army training in the Waiouru training area,** we did navigation exercises, in the winter. A lot of the time it snowed. Or visibility was poor, and the days were shorter. And it became dark very early. We'd orientate our compasses to the maps, which was very important during night navigation, or in poor visibility.

Sometimes you'd be tempted to navigate using landmarks like electric pylons, or nearby hills, which wasn't the best way to navigate. Your perspective could change as you moved from one location to another. Or you could end up following the wrong set of pylons.

**The one thing I will always remember our instructor saying was:**

**“The compass is always right! You are always wrong!”**

**In the Christian life, Christ is that compass. The One who will bring your life back on the right path when you go the wrong way.**

**The compass is always right! You are always wrong!**

**Today, on this first day of Spring we are celebrating the beginning of the season that is often used as a metaphor for Resurrection.** From the browns and the greys and the dead leaves of winter, we witness the transformation which the season of Spring brings. The days become longer. The temperatures become warmer. We actually feel like going outside and sitting in the sun, or diving into a pool or a river, or into the sea.

In the Spring, we witness a Resurrection. Our readings today are all about the transformation that takes place in the life of the believer.

In our reading from Ecclesiastes, we are reminded of the Seasons of Life. Life is a mixed bag of good times and sad times. When these seasons of life happen, we shouldn't consider them to be unusual. They are all part of the circle of life (including 'a time to die').

In our second reading, St Paul contrasts the existence we would call, 'death', with new life in the Spirit. (Galatians 5: 22- 25):

*<sup>22</sup>By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.*

In the new life in Christ, we will experience the fruits of the Spirit.

**Matthew 6: 24 – 34 is part of Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount'.** It is part of the Wisdom literature of the New Testament. In that sermon Jesus bids his hearers not to worry, or over-think their problems. He refers to the wildflowers that grow in the fields, attended by an apparently invisible gardener.

*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup>yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?*

I don't know if that is very reassuring to our generation. We put a lot of store in insurance and retirements savings, but I think what Jesus said, needs to be read in the wider context of the Christian Hope which is created by the Resurrection.

It is a hope that gives us a kind of incurable optimism about life and about death.

We are a people of Hope because we believe in the One who died and who rose again.

I hope you will have a great Spring and Summer. May it be a time of new life for you and yours. May we never lose the Hope that is ours because of our faith in the Story of the Resurrection, and the Empty Tomb.

## PRAYER

God of All Seasons,  
Fill us with Your love, and compassion  
As we navigate this new season of life.  
Help us to extend grace to others and ourselves,  
Recognizing that we are all a work in transformation  
May Your wisdom be our guide, comforting us in times of difficulty,  
And empowering us to see the path of life  
Along the changeful way.  
Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.