



Easter – the Resurrection of the Lord

24th April 2011

Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, Colossians 3:1-4, Matthew 28:1-10

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

If we are to understand Easter, and if we desire to embody resurrection and to embrace a paradigm of life that is not bounded by death, then we must look beyond the immediate story of Easter. For many people, and for much of the Church, the Easter story is a story that has Jesus as both subject and object. It is a different narrative when we see Jesus as verb. The early church saw the Easter event as being all about Jesus; ironically Jesus never saw it that way at all; rather he seems in the gospel narratives, to be an event, an enlightening, a revelation, an illumination of the dynamic between God and man, between Divinity and Humanity, between creator and creation.

In an orthodox understanding, Jesus can be placed within the realms and genre of Superman comics. He is portrayed as an ideal that in turn, excites our own internal ideals and yet always remains beyond our expectations of what we might realize for ourselves. A coloured cape, and a pair of red underpants worn outside a pair of blue trousers might give you an appearance approximating that of superman. Others might even recognise you as such at a dress up party, but you know you are still just you underneath the disguise. And I wonder, do we, the church, achieve or aspire to anything more than wearing our Jesus underpants on the outside?

The Easter narrative is a creation story; it serves to illuminate the Divine process of life. Jesus is not the subject, *we* are. Jesus is not the object, *we* are; and we are the verb that Jesus illuminates. Jesus is not the event of Easter; the Easter event is the everyday, eternal process of dying and rising, the activity of realising resurrection. The movement of discovering a life beyond the fears that limit our fullness of being - death being the primary fear and the boundary that we see as the end.

Again, an orthodox understanding is primitive at best; it emphasizes Jesus' resurrection as the act that has overcome death's sting, and in so doing has put resurrection into a context of after-death. We only have to revisit the narrative of Lazarus to appreciate that resurrection was not a one-off achievement by superman, rather it is identified as a movement, an experience, a process and a part of our becoming, as we realize more fully who we are and who we are called to be.

Let's take the focus off Jesus and rather look at the stone that was rolled away, for that too is part of the Easter narrative and so too, a part of the process of Easter that is being revealed to us in and through the teachings of the gospel. And as we do, as we look at the stone, hold an appreciation that

the primitive orthodoxy of the Church, that Sunday School understanding that so many cling to, is clung to out of fear. All of us, I'm sure, have some appreciation of the 'unchanging' stance of the institution of the Church that holds on to a flat-earth understanding of Life. If we walk free from the entombment of orthodoxy we can open our eyes to the Divine revelation that is evidenced in Science, Physics, in the natural world, the socio-political movement of history, and also that is evidenced in other ancient religious traditions. And as we open our eyes so too we might more fully appreciate the depth that is latent in our own holy texts. We have, alongside our symbol of the stone rolled away, placed an icon from the Hindu tradition, the image of Siva Nataraja - the Cosmic Dancer. It doesn't belong in our tradition – it's another ancient icon.

When Fr Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk, visited Sr. Pascaline, a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration at the Osage Monastery in 1978, he presented them with a statue of Nataraja, saying that Christians must begin to see Nataraja as the symbol of the risen Christ. Let me read a brief orientation of this unfamiliar symbol for you.

The meaning of Nataraja's Dance is expressed symbolically by his posture and attributes.

Siva dances on the Demon of Ignorance: Human beings can only reach true wisdom by conquering the ignorance or illusion, which takes the phenomenal world as real, instead of seeing all as a reflection or manifestation of the Ultimate Reality underlying everything.

He dances within the flamed arch: The arch represents nature, the processes of the Universe and the Transcendental Light sustaining it. Siva dancing within and touching the arch with head, hands and feet is the universal omnipresent Spirit.

In one ear he wears a female earring, and in the other a male one: signifying that he represents both the masculine and the feminine energy in the Cosmos. Already we're light years ahead of the Church.

He has four arms: the upper right arm carries a drum, signifying Creation, the Creative Energy of Sound - the Divine Word . In the palm of His upper left arm he bears a tongue of flame, which symbolises Destruction, but also purification.

The balance of the hands gives equal weight to both creation and destruction, as necessary for purification, evolution and transformation. Creation and destruction – dying and rising.

The lower right arm is placed in the 'fear not' gesture – the gesture of our angels - and the lower left arm is pointing to the lifted foot, indicating release from ignorance - Grace.

All activities happen simultaneously - creation, destruction and the granting of Grace.

It is amazing what happens when we roll the stone away. The light gets into the tomb of darkness. In the garden of Easter morning the stone of Mary's grief was rolled away: she witnessed life. The rolling away of the stone echoes the apple in the Garden of Eden – it is a taste of death that brings into being a new fullness of life. It is witnessed too by Abraham and Sarah, when three angels roll away the stone of Sarah's barrenness and fulfill the promise that captured Abraham's faith. The same stone Moses saw rolled from the homes of the Jewish people in Egypt, their doorways marked with blood so that death would Passover them. It is the same stone that Jacob rested his head on and found the stairway to heaven in his dreams. And it is the stone that formed the altar of the church on which the sacred sacraments are birthed through the thanksgiving prayers of the people.

Here at St Paul's the stone has also been rolled away. The stone here carries the symbol of the window, which invites us to look beyond the church. The stone forms the altar in the chapel floor, centering our prayers and earthing our deepest desires, giving light to the newness of life that is revealed when we walk through the doorways of the sanctuary, which is how we shall walk today when we leave the church. We have moved beyond the wooden altar, the material of the cross, to the round stone that gives us an entry into the garden of life.

For a long time, we were confined by the theology of the Cross. We could see in the walls of the church the cracks that let the light in. What a beautiful misunderstanding we all enjoyed with Leonard Cohen playing in the background. We embraced a theology of brokenness, of Christ crucified, and that's just where most of the Church has been left – hanging on the cross.

Today we celebrate Life - I AM making all things new. No longer is it the cracks that let the light in, for the stone has been rolled away and opened us up to the reality of Resurrection.

To truly celebrate Easter, we each, and together, need to roll away the stone or the stones that block the entrance to Resurrection for us.

The Lord be with you.
Peter Humphris