26 April 2015 Fourth Sunday after Easter

Acts 4: 5-12
Psalm 23
1 John 3: 16-24
John 10:11-18

The movement into the Easter tomb is quite naturally associated with death; and easily illustrated by the hymn 'in the tomb so cold they laid him'; it is a funeral movement and if filmed would most likely be sound tracked by a Verdi or Brahms requiem.
It is the movement of Good Friday, and it often brings us to a place of silence as we momentarily confront and contemplate our own dying.

In our composition of life, the movement into the tomb is the final movement.

The Easter narrative however, gives us a new orchestration, a new composition of life that goes beyond the requiem of death, beyond the final movement of a funeral dirge; it takes us beyond and into the resurrection. And most who have listened to this new composition have an appreciation of 'life after death'; a new movement in the composition of life; that Christians call hope and atheists call delusion.

Today's readings however illuminate some real misunderstandings from both viewpoints.
If we look at the readings seeking to understand the composition, rather than with any pre-conceived 'knowing', we can perhaps hear in these lyrics a song and movement that we've not previously heard.

From the gospel we hear; "*The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*"

There is a mystical note in John's gospel, it is subtle, beyond the obvious of the other three gospels and john is sharing a glimpse of what Jesus

revealed; perhaps it is only a glimpse for it is difficult to give a full picture of that which is unseen.

"*The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*"
The 'Good Shepherd' doesn't die for his sheep; he "*lays down his life for the sheep.*"
And as we read further: "*I lay down my life in order to take it up again.*"

John is so obviously not talking about 'dying' and then life after death; what John is talking about is resurrection as a lived reality.
"*I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.*"

There has been, and still is, a confusion of understanding that equates resurrection with 'life after death'; as if resurrection were confused with resuscitation.

John, more so than the other gospel writers has a deeper appreciation of Christ's revelation; he's not as confined by the orthodox Hebrew expectation of an apocalyptic end-time resurrection; rather he is discerning resurrection as a movement of life and a re-creation into life's fullness.

"*The good shepherd **lays down** his life for the sheep.*"

In the second reading that same truth is echoed, and it calls into question one of the cornerstones of much Christian theology; "*he laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.*"

So we can forget the doctrine of atonement that says "Jesus died **for** us"; for if he died for us there would be no need for us to "*to lay down our lives for one another.*"

And what we therefore begin to see in John's writings is that the 'laying down of life' is illustrative of the movement into resurrection.

And we begin to seek an understanding of resurrection as a lived reality.

As we look back through the scriptures, John's appreciation of resurrection finds echoes in some of the other ancient stories.

The first account of resurrection; Adam and Eve eat the fruit of death that takes them from the garden of God into the fullness of humanity.

In the flood narrative, all that God created is drowned in the waters of chaos and through the ark of humanity resurrection is found through the person of Noah.

And again, in the book of Exodus, we find the people of Israel entombed in slavery in Egypt, and with raised hands, and a raised staff Moses brings resurrection and brings a new freedom to all.

In each of these stories, as in the Easter narrative, resurrection is not a course correction, nor is it a hoped for after death experience. Resurrection is a movement, a re-orchestration of life that creates a different tune and a different song by which to live.

Resurrection is the result of choice followed by actions that embrace a new life outlook and a very different journey.

It is a movement into the very depth of our humanity, a movement into our Christ-likeness and into our fullness of life and fullness of being.

In the scientific world, "***Classical physics*** *explains matter and energy on a scale familiar to human experience, including the behaviour of astronomical bodies. It remains the key to measurement for much of modern science and technology.*"
And then another field of study: "***Quantum mechanics*** *is the science of the very small: the body of scientific principles that explains the behaviour*

of matter and its interactions with energy on the scale of atoms and subatomic particles."

The quantum physicist is looking at the unseen in the natural world and yet at the same time is looking at the very building blocks of all life.

"Some aspects of quantum mechanics can seem counterintuitive or even paradoxical, because they describe behaviour quite different from that seen at larger length scales. In the words of Richard Feynman, quantum mechanics deals with "nature as She is""

When we read the scriptures we too are looking at the unseen, looking at the building blocks of humanity, and what it means to be human, and to be fully alive…
What we discover, is a oneness of humanity – "we are members of one body", and we see that life has an eternal timeless presence, "love never ends"

Resurrection, like the discoveries of the quantum physicists, "*can seem counterintuitive or even paradoxical";* however Jesus reveals it as the path to life; and as we come to appreciate the life revealed in and through Christ, then we will discover

"*he laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."*