

“Trust the Tethering” a sermon preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Easter Day 17 April 2022 by Kerry Enright. The readings were 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 and Luke 24:1-12.

In our faith, death and resurrection are such rich concepts that we cannot reduce them to what happens to individuals when they stop breathing. In the Christian faith, death means much more than our physical death. And resurrection means much more than what happens to us when we physically die. The concepts are so rich in meaning that they take up major parts of the gospels and of the letters of Paul especially. They are such rich concepts that we keep finding ways they help us make sense of what is happening to us and to our world here and now. Today I explore just one thread.

Our common language and popular culture are filled with the apocalyptic which is not surprising given the backdrop to our living. So we have monster movies – Jurassic Park when dinosaurs come back to life. Alien films when we are visited by beings from another galaxy. Films that portray destructive forces in very scary form like the Men in Black series. Dramas of nuclear destruction with the survival of only a chosen few. Zombie stories – undead beings created through the reanimation of a corpse.

None of this is surprising because around us are forces that seem to have apocalyptic powers, the power to shut down life finally and ultimately. In relation to the environment – think of Bolsonaro and the Amazon, of our continued use of coal and plastic, despite what we know is happening to our environment. There are forces that shut down the power of reason and truthfulness – so the world’s wealthiest person, Elon Musk, is aiming to buy Twitter and to use it to promote freedom, which surely is coded language for a certain kind of fake news. There are forces that shut down democracy as we are seeing in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. There are forces that shut down the affirmation of people’s God-given identity as the movements that are anti LGBTQI. There are forces that shut down our own freedom to live into a life of equality and justice, of care for creation, of the dignity of human beings. And these ways soak into our life.

There is a strong strand in our Christian tradition that would see these and much more as the power of death: the capacity of human beings to shut down life, or the capacity of human beings to develop ways of thinking and ways of being that close people off from life, and to perpetuate those ways until we cannot imagine a different future.

Indeed, there is a strong strand in our faith that would say we are, you and I, the walking dead. We have so lost the capacity to shape our existence together, that we are, effectively, powerless, trapped, shut-down, not able to think or live for the sake of our world. We are people who consume one another and the environment we inhabit.

That tradition suggests that while it is good to make small changes here or there, to do a little better and to be more kind, these are not sufficient to bring in a good world of truth and life, of love and justice and peace.

It's not surprising that this is how early Christians thought because they were enveloped by the Roman Empire, a power that determined who would live and who would die, who would be wealthy and who would be poor, who benefitted and who was excluded. The Empire embodied the power of death, and those trapped by the empire were the walking dead, whether they were the rulers like Pilate trapped by power or the fishers of Capernaum trapped by crippling taxes. The Empire still lives today.

Contemporary apocalyptic stories promote a feeling of catastrophe. They emphasise impending and inevitable destruction, and they leave us to live with inevitable catastrophe as best we can.

The aim of Christian imagery is very different, not catastrophe but crisis, and crisis opens us out to making choices. Crisis assumes that the power of death need not prevail, that catastrophe is not inevitable.

Which is why the concept of resurrection is so central to our faith. Because the resurrection overturns the power of death. The resurrection overturns the power of the Empire. The resurrection of Jesus speaks of life beyond death.

The raising of the dead overturns the power of death. The raising of the human one, Jesus Christ, sucks from our age the power of death. And for Paul, Christ is only the first fruit of those who will be raised. So resurrection is the Dawn of the Dead. On Easter morning, as the sun rose, early Christians were baptised,

and as they came out of the water they were awakened to the dawn of the reign of Christ. The dawn of the dead.

Resurrection is about reversing the influence and power of the death-dealing powers infesting our society. Resurrection is about the insurgency of life overturning what kills.

As Christians, our focus is on that resurrection, because it opens us out to possibilities for life. It cracks open the dark tomb we have imagined our world to be. It says that there is death and the power of death, yes. But the power of death is not the greatest power, by a long way. Resurrection is about the power of Christ sucking from us the power death has over our lives, the power that stops people from being fully human.

The resurrection is the realm of God breaking into our world and into our lives, the realm of justice and life, the realm of equality and love, the realm of a world that thrives in balance, of creation flourishing, the realm where Christ is risen ruler. And the risen Christ is the one who anchors our life in that realm when we are joined to him.

You may not see it, but I have brought the anchor from our boat and placed it down here in the side aisle. We must use that anchor to secure our boat to the shore when we come to a bay we want to explore, when we don't want the boat to float away from us or be blown into the lake. So we put the anchor securely on the beach, with the boat tethered to it.

I am using the anchor as a symbol of how we are secured to the way God wants this world to be, a symbol that your life is secured by Christ to God's coming realm. The life we saw in Jesus, the love we saw embodied to the point of death, is secured for you in God, and we are invited to pray for God's Spirit to unite us with the life of Christ, secured in God, secured in the coming realm of God.

If we are trapped in this world, if we are only the walking dead, then we will adjust our lives to the way our world is, to inequality and injustice, to colonisation and degradation. But if we are secured in Christ in the coming realm of God, that is the pull on our direction, that is the orientation of our lives, that is the power that has hold over us, drawing us out in care for our world.

And the people who point to that way, who turn us in that direction, are those who gain no benefit from the world as it is, from the way things are. And we see that in the story from Luke. The stone is rolled away. The physical life of Jesus is no longer trapped inside a closed off world. And the ones who speak of that are Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the other women with them. They gained no benefit from the way the world was.

That is why in the church we pay so much attention to the voices of those not benefitting from the way our world is now. They keep reminding us of the world in which we are secured in Christ, through the resurrection of Christ, with whom we know the power of resurrection now.

I am grateful for ideas in a book by Brian K. Blount *Invasion of the Dead, Preaching Resurrection* Westminster John Knox Press Louisville 2014

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As Christians, our focus is on that resurrection, because it opens us out to possibilities for life. It cracks open the dark tomb we have imagined our world to be. It says that there is death and the power of death, yes. But the power of death is not the greatest power, by a long way. Resurrection is about the power of Christ sucking from us the power death has over our lives, the power that stops people from being fully human.

The resurrection is the realm of God breaking into our world and into our lives, the realm of justice and life, the realm of equality and love, the realm of a world that thrives in balance, of creation flourishing, the realm where Christ is risen ruler. And the risen Christ is the one who anchors our life in that realm when we are joined to him.

You may not see it, but I have brought the anchor from our boat and placed it down here in the side aisle. We must use that anchor to secure our boat to the shore when we come to a bay we want to explore, when we don't want the boat to float away from us or be blown into the lake. So we put the anchor securely on the beach, with the boat tethered to it.

I am using the anchor as a symbol of how we are secured to the way God wants this world to be, a symbol that your life is secured by Christ to God's coming realm. The life we saw in Jesus, the love we saw embodied to the point of death, is secured for you in God, and we are invited to pray for God's Spirit to unite us with the life of Christ, secured in God, secured in the coming realm of God.

If we are trapped in this world, if we are only the walking dead, then we will adjust our lives to the way our world is, to inequality and injustice, to colonisation and degradation. But if we are secured in Christ in the coming realm of God, that is the pull on our direction, that is the orientation of our lives, that is the power that has hold over us, drawing us out in care for our world.

And the people who point to that way, who turn us in that direction, are those who gain no benefit from the world as it is, from the way things are. And we see that in the story from Luke. The stone is rolled away. The physical life of Jesus is no longer trapped inside a closed off world. And the ones who speak of that are Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the other women with them. They gained no benefit from the way the world was.

That is why in the church we pay so much attention to the voices of those not benefitting from the way our world is now. They keep reminding us of the world in which we are secured in Christ, through the resurrection of Christ, with whom we know the power of resurrection now.

I am grateful for ideas in a book by Brian K. Blount *Invasion of the Dead, Preaching Resurrection* Westminster John Knox Press Louisville 2014

KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

***Captivated by the vision of the realm of God,
made known in Jesus, given in grace***



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“Trust the Tethering” a sermon preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Easter Day 17 April 2022 by Kerry Enright. The readings were 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 and Luke 24:1-12.

In our faith, death and resurrection are such rich concepts that we cannot reduce them to what happens to individuals when they stop breathing. In the Christian faith, death means much more than our physical death. And resurrection means much more than what happens to us when we physically die. The concepts are so rich in meaning that they take up major parts of the gospels and of the letters of Paul especially. They are such rich concepts that we keep finding ways they help us make sense of what is happening to us and to our world here and now. Today I explore just one thread.

Our common language and popular culture are filled with the apocalyptic which is not surprising given the backdrop to our living. So we have monster movies – Jurassic Park when dinosaurs come back to life. Alien films when we are visited by beings from another galaxy. Films that portray destructive forces in very scary form like the Men in Black series. Dramas of nuclear destruction with the survival of only a chosen few. Zombie stories – undead beings created through the reanimation of a corpse.

None of this is surprising because around us are forces that seem to have apocalyptic powers, the power to shut down life finally and ultimately. In relation to the environment – think of Bolsonaro and the Amazon, of our continued use of coal and plastic, despite what we know is happening to our environment. There are forces that shut down the power of reason and truthfulness – so the world’s wealthiest person, Elon Musk, is aiming to buy Twitter and to use it to promote freedom, which surely is coded language for a certain kind of fake news. There are forces that shut down democracy as we are seeing in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. There are forces that shut down the affirmation of people’s God-given identity as the movements that are anti LGBTQI. There are forces that shut down our own freedom to live into a life of equality and justice, of care for creation, of the dignity of human beings. And these ways soak into our life.

There is a strong strand in our Christian tradition that would see these and much more as the power of death: the capacity of human beings to shut down life, or the capacity of human beings to develop ways of thinking and ways of being that close people off from life, and to perpetuate those ways until we cannot imagine a different future.

Indeed, there is a strong strand in our faith that would say we are, you and I, the walking dead. We have so lost the capacity to shape our existence together, that we are, effectively, powerless, trapped, shut-down, not able to think or live for the sake of our world. We are people who consume one another and the environment we inhabit.

That tradition suggests that while it is good to make small changes here or there, to do a little better and to be more kind, these are not sufficient to bring in a good world of truth and life, of love and justice and peace.

It's not surprising that this is how early Christians thought because they were enveloped by the Roman Empire, a power that determined who would live and who would die, who would be wealthy and who would be poor, who benefitted and who was excluded. The Empire embodied the power of death, and those trapped by the empire were the walking dead, whether they were the rulers like Pilate trapped by power or the fishers of Capernaum trapped by crippling taxes. The Empire still lives today.

Contemporary apocalyptic stories promote a feeling of catastrophe. They emphasise impending and inevitable destruction, and they leave us to live with inevitable catastrophe as best we can.

The aim of Christian imagery is very different, not catastrophe but crisis, and crisis opens us out to making choices. Crisis assumes that the power of death need not prevail, that catastrophe is not inevitable.

Which is why the concept of resurrection is so central to our faith. Because the resurrection overturns the power of death. The resurrection overturns the power of the Empire. The resurrection of Jesus speaks of life beyond death.

The raising of the dead overturns the power of death. The raising of the human one, Jesus Christ, sucks from our age the power of death. And for Paul, Christ is only the first fruit of those who will be raised. So resurrection is the Dawn of the Dead. On Easter morning, as the sun rose, early Christians were baptised,

and as they came out of the water they were awakened to the dawn of the reign of Christ. The dawn of the dead.

Resurrection is about reversing the influence and power of the death-dealing powers infesting our society. Resurrection is about the insurgency of life overturning what kills.

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