



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

I speak today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Over the past week, I've had two intense conversations about the resurrection of Jesus. The first happened Sunday last when I was with a group of scientists. And they wanted to ask about the integration of the insights of science with the insights of religion. Was it possible to both believe science fully and also believe in the insights of faith and theology and religion? And the question came that even if they could accept that God was alive and active in our world through the order and symmetry and beauty that we see around us, how could they hold on to this claim that Jesus was raised from the dead? How could they hold on to this claim of resurrection? This was a conversation and a challenge over what can be understood. It was an intellectual challenge.

And then over the course of this week, I was visited by a beautiful soul who told me that he was caring for a loved one and it was taking up a great deal of time, and he was struggling with cancer. And his question was, could he trust the resurrection? Was it going to be the case? Was there some assurance he could receive that when he closed his eyes for the last time, that he would open them in paradise, that when he closed his eyes for the last time, that he would open them and see the resurrected Jesus and experience that resurrection himself. This was a question that was not so much intellectual as it was existential and visceral.

And I have been thinking over the past week about my responses to both. To the scientist I had to say that I found the integration of science and religion interesting, but it could not answer the real problem that the resurrection answers. Because if you ask scientists how the world is going to end, how the universe is going to end, most physicists have an idea along a spectrum with two extremes. Either the universe is going to just experience heat death through entropy and move out into diffusions of nothingness. Or there will be a larger, something called the "big crunch," when the universe will hit the extent of its growth like an elastic band and suddenly snap back into something infinitely small and go into another big bang. The universe, in other words, when we listen to scientists, tells us that we, the universe itself, will die.

Death is certain in this universe. The most recent predictions is that it's going to happen, the midway point's going to hit around 15 billion years. So you can relax

and go to the rest of your schedule for today. But that death is certain. And the resurrection is the amazing claim that God is greater than that power of death in the universe. The resurrection is that amazing claim that we worship a good God and a powerful God who will defeat the power of death and everything that causes death, which is evil, sin, suffering, and the Devil. The power of the resurrection actually ups the ante and says, if there is a God in this world, that God is not only present in order and symmetry, that God is Lord over death.

And that is the claim of the resurrection. The resurrection is not merely a resuscitation of Jesus because in a resuscitation of Jesus, everything stays the same. When Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, that is a resuscitation. Lazarus will die again. When Jesus raises Jairus's daughter from the dead, that is a resuscitation, Jairus's daughter will die again. But when Jesus is raised from the dead, a new creation is brought into being. The same power in Jesus's resurrection was at work in the world when God said through God's word, let there be light. That same power was active in God's word when Jesus was raised from the dead and Jesus was raised and God said, hallelujah! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. That same power is at work in Jesus.

That is what we say about the resurrection to the scientist. It's not a knockdown, drag-out argument that one side wins and the other side loses because what's at stake in the resurrection is not some kind of rational ascent. It requires us a kind of choice of fidelity, a kind of choice that looks at this world in which we see sin and death and evil, and we say, no, I will stake my life on Jesus. I will stake my life on His resurrection. That is the answer to the scientist. It's not unreasonable, but it certainly is a leap of faith, not intellect.

And to the beautiful soul that is experiencing this question on a visceral level, on a level of existential dread, we can do nothing to say anything that will lessen the challenge of walking to our death. We can say nothing to someone who is facing that fear of closing their eyes for the last time. We can only increase their faith in Jesus. Because the good news of the resurrection is that Jesus himself, as God made man, Jesus Himself, experienced that terror. Jesus Himself had to close His eyes for the last time and believe that He would be raised by God. Jesus Himself had to walk through death and to gather up all that it means to be human. So that everything that we know, everything that we feel, that all the challenges we have, all the suffering we have experienced, all the sorrow we have borne, all of those things get transformed through him into the life that is greater than the power of death. And that movement is a movement, again, of faith, of trusting in God as we close our eyes for the last time.

And what's amazing to me as a priest over 30 years is not that there are people that go to their death fearful, but there are people, so many of them, that go to their death believing deeply in Jesus. That is the miracle, is it not, that so many

people are willing to stake their life on Christ? And again, that is not an act of intellect. It's not an act of somehow minimizing the pain and suffering that you and I experience when we close our eyes for the last time or walk with someone who does. What it is is an act of fidelity. It is to place our lives in the hands of Christ and say, I trust you, Lord Jesus. Take me.

It is a belief in a God who is greater than the power of sin and death and the grave because the resurrection is not a resuscitation. In a resuscitation, everything is returned to the same, but in the resurrection, a new creation is coming into being through Jesus Christ. And you and I are the heirs to that. When you and I say that Jesus is Lord, when you and I acclaim and say, hallelujah, Christ is risen, you and I participate in that new reality that is coming into being. This is the clear witness of the scriptures. “Jesus is,” Paul says in 1 Corinthians, “the first fruits of those who will be raised.” Jesus is the sign, in other words, the living sign that you and I are being renewed. And when you and I experience God in our life, when you and I can say with St. Paul, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. When you and I step into that new life of faith, we are experiencing that resurrection for ourselves, where we are and who we are.

That is what it means to follow Jesus and to believe in His resurrection. The resurrection is not a golden ticket that some of us will win at the end of living a good life. The resurrection is a new reality that all of us bear witness to by the life we live together in faith. The resurrection is that confidence we have that we are following a Jesus who is Lord and King of the universe and Lord over the forces that oppose God in this universe. Jesus is Lord over death. He is Lord over the grave. He is Lord over evil. He is Lord over sin.

All of this is clear in the scriptures. We see it in the Book of Acts, particularly. We actually, unfortunately but beautifully, skipped this moment in our reading from Acts this morning. It skips, you'll notice, and in the middle of it says this – and if I have anything to do with it, I'll change it from the beginning. “This Jesus, God raised up, and of that all of you are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this so that you both see and hear.” This is the claim of the scriptures. The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts sees the kingship of Jesus as central.

And it is clear throughout Acts, what gets Paul in trouble is not that Jesus died, it's that he is preaching that stunning revelation that God has raised Him from the dead. That is what gets Paul imprisoned and whipped and challenged because when you say that you worship a king who is raised from the dead, that means all bets are off. That means everyone is subject to that king. No one stands in the place of that king. No one stands alongside that king. Everyone stands beneath that king. And that king Jesus is going to bring us into resurrection. He's bringing

into being a new creation. He's bringing into being new life. He's bringing into being this new way that is our way as Christians.

Now, all of this is critical for us to keep in mind as we think about today's reading from the Gospel of Luke. Today's reading is known as the Road to Emmaus. And in it you can see a map of what it means to enter into that witness. When scripture speaks about the how of resurrection, there's often moments where Paul, for example, will speak about a seed that is planted and breaks forth and gives growth. There is often a moment of analogy, but today's gospel is critical because it's a kind of map as to how you and I can experience this resurrection in our life at a deeper level.

Because when those disciples are walking along and they meet the Jesus who is hidden from their eyes, there are certain things that are being revealed. There's being revealed the witness of the church. The first thing they say to Jesus is they've received some reports that there has been this amazing event that no one can completely understand, that leaves everyone astounded. And for you and I, that is usually the first moment where we begin to step into the resurrection. We hear a witness. And that witness moves us and that witness intrigues us and we hear news that is astonishing. We have a moment of the interpretation of the scriptures. And the beautiful thing that this hidden Jesus does is He walks into the midst of the disciples and He interprets the scriptures through the figure of Himself, through the lens of His own life and His own love. And that is another way in which we see the resurrection. It's by reading through those scriptures, not as simply events that have been passed, but as a present and future that you and I are being called to live into because the scriptures are showing us this Jesus who is greater than the power of sin and death and evil.

And there also is a moment of incredible sacramental intimacy. Jesus takes the bread and breaks it, and suddenly the disciples see Jesus. That bread is, of course, a reference to the Last Supper, but it also is a reference to the bread and wine that you and I share day in and day out when we take this sacrament together. The bread and wine of the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, it's not a mere memory of who Jesus is. The bread and wine of the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ is the presence of Christ here before us today. That is the power of this meal that we have together. It tells us that we are all broken pieces of the same loaf. We are broken pieces of the same broken loaf who is yet present with us because He is alive.

And finally, we have these moments in which there is a kind of journey. Everything in today's gospel happens in a journey, and I sometimes wonder why the gospel writer framed it just this way. But they are walking in a journey and they're showing hospitality to a stranger who has intrigued them. And all the while, Jesus is present. Isn't that amazing? That is, for us, an indication of the shape of the

resurrection in our lives. We grow in our relationship with Jesus, we grow in our confidence in His resurrection. Yes, today's service began with a prayer that God would open the eyes of our faith. But it's a little bit like walking into a room and turning on the lights and letting your eyes adjust to the reality around you. It is a slow journey of acclimation to this new reality that God brings us in Jesus.

And so they meet Jesus at Emmaus. I have to tell you something about Emmaus. No one knows where it is. When they said Emmaus, everybody said, yeah, it's over that way. A little bit like Canton. I never know when I'm in Canton. I never know when I've left Canton. Same with Novi. I'm suddenly there, but I'm not there. Oh, that's in Canton. Oh, that's in Novi. Emmaus. It's one of those moments in which they're told that they're on a journey. Because it's a witness that the life of Christ, the life of proclaiming that resurrection is a journey.

Now, I have two pieces of art that I'm going to move really quickly through today because I find it remarkable that Michelangelo Caravaggio did two pieces on the supper at Emmaus. And it is incredible because the first one is done in 1601 when Caravaggio is in his early thirties and life is just coming to him in roses. He is doing incredibly well and he has this vision of how to depict the Supper at Emmaus. He actually sets it in a Roman tavern and he places the disciples as poor people, as ordinary people. You can see the tears on their clothing. These are not wealthy or wise people. And they have been brought into this moment with this young Jesus who actually has been modeled on the Sistine Chapel's Christ who comes in glory.

And in that moment you see that the scriptures are implicit, and you have that moment where the sacrament is being lifted up. You have ordinary people and you have these reminders of Christ's victory over death. You see death in the little bird there with its treacherous little claw. You see death in the fruit on the table, which is rotting. And yet, in the midst of it, there is that bread and that wine, that life, that promise. And when Jesus points out that moment, that that bread and wine is His body and His blood, you see Cleopas on the right of the painting, throwing out his arms in its own cruciform cross-like figure. And you see on his necklace, there is a shell, which means he is a pilgrim.

So this is a depiction of both the original Emmaus moment. It's a beautifully faithful reading of that scripture. But it's been set into real time as a reminder to us, the viewer, that the resurrection is real for us too. What does the resurrection look like for you? Where do you set your experience of the resurrection in your life? How is that resurrection being lived out? Where have you found Jesus in the most amazing place, in a place you never expected to see Him, where you are suddenly reminded of His victory over death and sin in the grave?

The second image I have for you is from Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*, which he did in 1606. He had a spectacular fall from grace. Caravaggio struggled with what we would call impulse control. He lost his temper a lot, and when that happened, people got hurt. Famously, he threw a plate of artichokes at a waiter in Rome, and for some reason that was more than people could handle. But then things took a turn even more treacherous. He got into an argument over a tennis match and then killed his adversary, and so he had to run for his life. Caravaggio had a life, said one biographer, that was both perfectly sacred and perfectly profane, much like ours, don't you think?

And as he was moving to the end of his life, he got one last commission due to the *Supper at the Emmaus*. And in this one, he doesn't have reminders of death and sin on the table. He just has the bread and the wine. He doesn't put those reminders in because perhaps in his own life, those things were too obvious to him. You only see a Jesus who has somehow become a little bit older than the first Jesus. This is a Jesus who has taken on death and who yet lives.

And you have an incredible, beautiful moment in which you have two people standing above the table. That is, for some, the innkeeper and the wife who took him in when no one else would. When he was running for his life, someone took him in and that was his witness to the resurrection. The Road to Emmaus happened not only in a Roman tavern, not only in the midst of everyday life, but it came to him at that moment when he needed love and compassion and mercy the most.

So for those of you who are looking for an intellectual reason to believe in the resurrection, I invite you to join me in a great leap of faith because I believe with all my heart and soul that Jesus is worth betting your life on. And for those of you who are looking for some kind of solace, for some kind of support, as you face those existential questions, when you face that visceral fear of your own death or death itself, my invitation to you today is to remember that Jesus has walked that path with you so that you will be with Him forever. For that resurrection is real. We find it in witness. We find it in word. We find it in sacrament. We find it in community. We find it in generosity. We find it in hospitality. We find it in all the things we do as we make our journey. Stay on that journey. Walk with me. Proclaim Christ is risen from the dead.