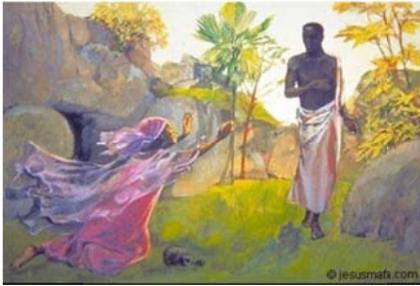


“Everyday Is A Good Day To Die”

Dr. D. Jay Losher

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Luke 20:27-38 + 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 = Resurrection

The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard would go about the streets of Copenhagen asking complete strangers and friends alike if they believed Jesus was raised from the dead. Almost everyone answered “Yes.” Then he would ask them what difference it made in the way they lived, to which he would receive just blank stares. Kierkegaard concluded that Jesus being raised from the dead had not the slightest impact on peoples’ lives.¹



I have no doubt the same survey here today would yield the same results. Jesus being raised is actually Christianity’s most critical belief. Our earliest faith statement is “He is risen” with the immediate response “He is risen indeed.” However, for most followers of Jesus, his resurrection is of little or no consequence.

Apparently it hasn’t been for quite some time.

No real surprise here. If we took it seriously, the resurrection is just crazy talk. Dead is dead. Nothing causes more disorientation, confusion and outright consternation than the whole notion that Jesus died, really stone dead, and then Jesus was alive, really alive. That simply does not happen in our universe. Nothing seems more prone to drive our logical minds into chaos.

Yet here today we see Jesus disputing with the Sadducees over precisely this crazy-making subject. The Sadducees thought they had set up a trap for Jesus to fall into. While the Pharisees and most Jews of Jesus day believed in a future resurrection, the Sadducees denied it.

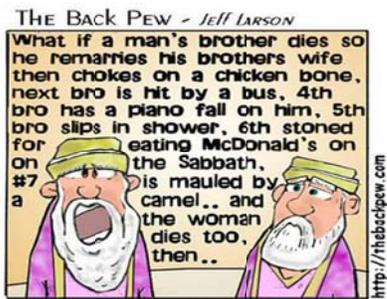


The Sadducees were the party of the wealthy priests controlling the temple. They didn’t believe in resurrection, nor the immortality of the soul, nor any other form of afterlife. That would undermine their economic interests. They also denied the existence of Satan, demons and angels, and

consequently denied that this age, and by extension the temple worship they controlled, were corrupt.

They did believe in one thing, an absolute sense of free will; that God's blessing and punishment are immediate in this life; that God blessed the righteous and only the righteous with worldly success. And God punishes sinners right now with disease and hardship and oppression. Since the priests had grown wealthy from the temple worship, in their own eyes that was proof positive of their superior righteousness.

In Chapter 20 of Luke, all the parties in Jerusalem, Sadducees included, could not agree on anything at all ~ except getting rid of Jesus. The Sadducees were angry, really fuming that Jesus had cleansed the Temple. He attacked not only their livelihood but their self-righteousness. Worse, he had a following. He had to be stopped.



They have no interest in discussing the resurrection. They simply want to separate Jesus from his followers. So they lay a trap set up as a logic bomb.

Jesus answered that God's raising us from death to life is really real. That it would indeed happen within history; and that resurrection life is nothing

like this life. Further, that the resurrection does not just change us as individuals. It is cosmic in scope. The resurrection changes everything everywhere. Revivified life is living in God's realm and reign in completeness.



You are going to find this hard to believe, but resurrection for early Christians never meant life after death. The early Christians knew death to be really dead. There is no continued consciousness; no immortality of the soul; no spirit separating from the body and going straight to heaven.



For early Christians, at death one enters an interim period of bodily death with no consciousness. This body deteriorates, eventually disappears. Resurrection is new bodily life which happens sometime after bodily death.²

When the early Christians spoke of heaven, they didn't mean by it the destination we mean at all. They saw heaven as a mere way station, a holding pattern, between death and resurrection. The ultimate destination was, is resurrection.³



The Apostle Paul, in the section just earlier in I Corinthians 15, talks of death being like a seed planted. A new plant, a new life eventually emerges: an entirely new body, a glorious body. Like a seed: “**sown as perishable; raised imperishable.**”⁴ In the resurrection we will receive a new body, a transformed body. It will have new properties we can only dream of.⁵

Carlyle Marney, the brilliant but cantankerous Baptist preacher, was speaking on a Christian College campus. A student asked him to say a few words about the resurrection of the dead. Marney replied:



“I will not discuss the resurrection with people like you: I don't discuss such things with anyone under 30. Look at you all: in the prime of life. Never have you known honest-to-God failure, heartburn, impotency, solid defeat, brick walls or mortality. You're extremely apt and handsome ~ white kids who have never in all of your lives been 30 miles from home, or 20 minutes into the New Testament, or more than a mile and a half from a Baptist or Methodist church, or within a thousand miles of any issue that mattered to a kingdom that matters. So what can you know of a world that makes sense only if Christ is raised?”⁶

Marney would ask the same question of us who are over 30, have travelled and experienced widely, and have the scars to prove it. This is Kierkegaard's question brought up to date: “What do we know of a world that only makes sense if Christ is raised?”

At SMU in some lectures years later, Marney confessed that there were days he didn't know if he believed in the resurrection. His friend and theology professor Albert Outler stopped him in the hall and said, “Marney, whoever told you that you had to believe in the resurrection every day?”

Marney responded: “Well, Albert, if you know so much, when do I have to believe in the resurrection?”

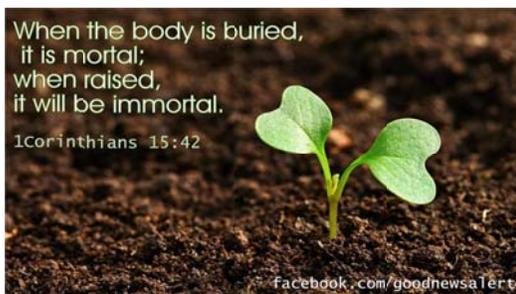
Outler: “On the day you die and the day you help someone else die; that’s when you believe in the resurrection.”⁷



Outler’s answer is good, but still begs the question of what it means to us on all the other, the 99.9%, days of our lives. There is however, a Native American expression which makes sense of this: “Today is a good day to die.” So perhaps every day is a good day to believe in the resurrection.

Instead of the resurrection being crazy-making, shouldn’t Christ being raised actually guide us in making sense of our insane world?

Resurrection is a promise and a message: Resurrection is hope that amongst the dross and manure of life, there are also experiences awaiting us of deep joy and great glory, inspiration to hope and engage and live compassionately.



Our God is God of second chances, of unlimited chances, of righting wrongs, of justice and mercy and peace. God’s reign and realm will actually be fulfilled in the future revivification of each and every one of us.

Today is indeed a good day to die. Because of the resurrection, we can live each day with courage, with honesty, with as much faith and integrity we can muster, so we are ready to meet our maker, confident that God may say “well done, good and faithful servant.”

¹ Will Willimon, *Pulpit Resource* 38.4 for 11/7/2010, p. 28

² N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* Kindle Edition, loc 648-649

³ *ibid*, loc 767

⁴ I Corinthians 15:36-44

⁵ Wright, *op. cit.*, loc 807

⁶ Kyle Childress, “Living By The Word,” *Christian Century* 11/2/2010, p. 20

⁷ Childress, *op. cit.*