

Sermon for the First Sunday after Easter 2020.

Wisdom 2:23&3:1-9. Hebrews 2:9-15. Psalm 16:9-12. Luke 24:13:35.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

The Collect for today, in the Welsh Book of Common Prayer asks God to 'grant us so perfectly, and without any doubt, to believe in his resurrection, that in thy sight our faith may never be reprov'd'.

There was a feature on the Saturday 'Today' Programme of Radio 4, about the Coptic Church in Britain. It was introduced with words to the effect that the Orthodox Church celebrates the sacrifice of Jesus a week later than others because they follow a different calendar. During the short piece the Coptic Bishop mentioned sacrifice and resurrection in the same phrase. It struck me that the continuity link that introduced the segment must have been suggested by the Religious Editor who had compiled the report. So, what's the issue?

The issue is that the BBC was wilfully, or unwittingly, more able to acknowledge that Easter was about sacrifice than resurrection. They couldn't be heard to imply that resurrection is true; though they didn't particularly dispute the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. They were doing the work of the devil: very subtly throwing doubt into the listener's mind. It's a leger de main: a light-fingered misdirection of the gaze to distract somebody in a conjuring trick. There are other examples of the BBC's disposition to throw doubt on the Christian Faith, but let us not be distracted by them now. Ultimately, God doesn't *need* the BBC to speak truth to people; but, given that a large majority are comfortable practitioners of 'short-cut thinking', it might be helpful if a major broadcaster provided more precise information. I can recommend C.S.Lewis's book 'The Screwtape Letters' as an entertaining and revealing expose of the wiles of the devil.

But, so much for the staff of the BBC. What about us? We are the ones who pray today that God will grant us so perfectly, and without any doubt, to believe in his resurrection. Perfectly, and without any doubt! That's a dogmatic statement about where our faith should stand. It should be steady as a rock. It should not admit a contrary argument. It is not something we should debate. It is not 'fake news'. However, there are some detractors, and we can feel pressured or tricked by their light-fingered misdirection; their sleight of hand. Wisdom 3:9 says that 'Those who trust in (God) will understand the truth, and the faithful will abide

with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his elect, and he watches over his holy ones.’ It goes on to warn that ‘the ungodly will be punished as their reasoning deserves.’ True wisdom is understood by the faithful through God’s grace and mercy, and false thinking will have negative consequences in this life and the next.

During the week I read a comment to the effect that Christ could have chosen to vanish whilst on the cross. Wouldn’t that have been a better way to convince people that He was indeed God? Though that remark was made by a Christian commentator (I think Christian), it comes close to the Moslem assertion that Christ did not actually die on the cross, but Simon of Cyrene had been crucified in His stead. There’s another leger de main! Luke 24:13ff tells us that two of the disciples were on the road to Emmaus, talking about what had happened when Jesus drew near and went with them. These were men from Jesus’ inner circle (24:24), who reported that the disciples who went to have a look at the empty tomb did not see Him. Jesus’ response was: “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken!”

In short, God had a plan from the very beginning of creation. He knew that Adam and Eve would presume they ought to be able to know as much as God himself knows. Despite their self-confidence, they lacked self-awareness. If we think we know ourselves, that inner knowledge is *all* we know...to an extent... for the moment... So, we shouldn’t be so confident that *all* that *can* be known *is* known by us of ourselves. However, as Christians, we *do* know our need of God. We know Him through faith and because He has loved us with Grace and Mercy. Our knowledge of Him is limited, but it is a gift from Him. Through faith we have grasped something of His sacrifice, and something of the magnitude of His resurrection. We have glimpsed something of the big picture of salvation beyond our sin and despite the impending death of our earthly body.

We want to believe in his resurrection perfectly and without any doubt, but, on this side of the grave we won’t. We will know it by faith. And, because of God’s grace and mercy, we can recognise Him in the breaking of bread. He will touch our heart and warm it up. Thanks be to God. Christ is risen. Alleluia, He is risen indeed.