

A man named Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth around the year 54. Not 1954 but 0054. This is important because some of the critiques of the Church and of Scripture is that the Gospels were written a while, maybe a generation, after they occurred. From the best estimates, Jesus was crucified and rose again in the spring of 32. That means Paul's letter was written twenty-two years later. In that letter (1 Corinthians) he wrote, "I handed on to you [the people in Corinth] what I had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

I bring this up because twenty-two years after Good Friday and Easter, Paul "handed on what he had received". Although it looks like Paul was quoting the Nicene Creed, it would be the reverse because that document was written in 327. Yes, there was already a creedal form of the faith that was established and given to Paul after his conversion from persecutor of the young Church to one of its greatest evangelists and planters. Some believed the creedal form was written around 35.

In "what was handed" to Paul, more than 500 people saw and interacted with the risen Christ. And some of that group had died. Many believe that when Paul, a traveling evangelist and church planter, would bring with him witnesses – perhaps some were of that original 500. In today's reading, Paul writes this: Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.

The challenge here is not if Jesus was raised from the dead. The question is this: is resurrection of the dead for the rest of us. Why? Because of two facts – some in the Corinth church community had died. ... and Jesus has not yet returned. Therefore, is there a resurrection of the dead? Paul explained to them, in Greek (the original language of this letter), that yes there is a resurrection of the dead. He did it with two Greek words, "necros" and "hypnos". Necros is dead. Hypnos is sleeping (where we get the word hypnosis). Jesus was "necros". Believers, when they die, are hypnos. This is where we get the term "rest in peace". Rest – hypnos – and rise awake with Christ.

If I can change gears a bit, we're going to look at this passage through the Anglican idea of how God is revealed in three books – the book of Scripture, the book of nature and the book of reason. We read in Scripture that Christ came back from the dead. Do we see this in the book of nature? Yes, but we have to look carefully. On the All Angels campus, we have beautiful oak trees. On the spine of the oak, like the mane on a horse, you will see these brown, dead-looking growth. But, when it rains; like a good, heavy Florida rain; that dead-looking stuff will come to life. They are called resurrection ferns. It's a mystery of how they can survive, on the mane of an oak, through drought and all the rest and then when it rains, surprise, they grow! You can see it

around Palm Springs in California. Everything is brown and dead but then it rains and the whole desert floor springs to life (and then turns brown a few weeks later). Or how about the Woolly Bear Caterpillar in Alaska. Discovered by mistake, this cute caterpillar (which looks like a woolly bear) eats leaves until it freezes. The insect will remain frozen for ten months (sometimes at 60 below zero) and then in June, it thaws and continues eating. There is a tree frog who can survive long, cold and harsh winters. It freezes. Its heart stops beating and says that way for months. And then, when it warms up, the heart starts again and it goes along doing frog things. Resurrection! It was not necros it was hypnos.

What about the book of reason? Can we find resurrection there too? Quite by surprise, I ran into a high school friend at an airport (nowhere near where we grew up). We started talking and it was as if 25 years had never passed. The relationship was not necros, it was hypnos. Going a little deeper, have you ever forgiven someone or have been forgiven yourself? When we do that, we find what we thought was dead – the relationship – was simply sleeping. The “thawing” was forgiveness.

Last week I shared with you that I thought I was going to be an Episcopal priest when I was 12 years old. A year later, my dad, who was finishing his studies at the diocesan School for Ministry, was told there was a moratorium on ordinations and, as such, he didn't get ordained. I thought *If the Church doesn't want him, they won't want me*. So I let that dream die. I went into business and did other things. Church, however, became more and more difficult. I'd sit in the church – it didn't matter which one – and I'd get a sense of what I'd be preaching. The pulling sensation of leadership made church attendance uncomfortable. But, it wasn't until my wife and I were adopting our two daughters when I was alone, cold and scared in a hotel room in the middle-of-nowhere-Russia when I had a vision of Christ. With outstretched arms he asked if I was ready to follow him. What I thought was dead was simply sleeping and then rising with Christ.

We read in Scripture that God makes all things new. It's the nature of who God is. We see it revealed in the book of nature and in the book of reason.

What then about the resurrection of the dead? It's God's nature to make all things new. ... including the crucified Christ. No tomb, no rolled stone, no death was going to hold him back! God is the God of New Life! It stands to reason that when our mortal bodies lie in death that God, of new life, will raise us up. God does it in nature. God does it in our lives – relationships and all the rest – God also never gives up on us. We can run; but God is not dissuaded. It is with this hope and belief that those who have died are awaking with Christ. And that one day we too will sleep in rest and rise with him and those for whom we love but see no longer.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.