

St Mary Abbots Church Kensington

Sermon for Matins – Easter Sunday

The Revd Alice Ormondroyd, Assistant Curate

Readings:

Ezekiel 27.1-14

Luke 24:13-35

May I speak in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I begin by rejoicing on this day as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Happy Easter to you all.

What is that makes us alive? How do you know, in your body and mind that you are a living creature? It's a question that has troubled many of our great Philosophers, not least Descartes, whose conclusion that 'I think therefore I am' came to be a foundational motto for the 19th century Enlightenment movement. Clearly there is truth that our existence is in many ways confirmed by our senses – by our ability to think, and to reason, to feel, to reflect, to articulate, to argue even. Our minds are a significant part of our being.

But I want to explore what our Scriptures tell us about the distinctiveness of our existence as children of God. What does it mean to be alive, living in the present reality of God's created order? And what does it mean to look ahead, through the thin veil of death, into the heavenly Kingdom where our mortal bodies will be resurrected with Christ, who has gone before us to prepare the way? And, in having looked forward to the resurrection, how do we then return to the present, and live in light of it? What difference does it make to know that we ourselves will be resurrected, like Christ, in the Kingdom of God?

To exist, is to breathe. Life begins with breath. Indeed creation begins with breath, the breath of God which hovers over the waters of creation. To be alive is to breathe, and to exist in a bodily form. The beginning of our being able to understand something of the meaning of the resurrection, is to begin with affirming our life in a mortal body. Breathing, eating, drinking, talking, sharing, listening, moving. All of this is an intrinsic part of the reality of our createdness by God to be alive. Scripture reminds us that our bodies matter. There's a powerful theme throughout Scripture of God knowing our physical bodies, our bones, the hairs on our head. The physical matter of our existence is created and loved by God, and our bodies are something very concrete, very real, and very important for our life as Christians. I love the description of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is such a bodily description – of what they were thinking, and saying, and doing. I love the fact that despite everything being in such turmoil, they still, as bodily human beings, needed to stop, to eat and drink, and rest. And it is here, in meeting their bodily needs of food and water and rest, that finally they encounter the Risen Christ.

Because when we acknowledge our bodily selves, the fact that our minds and our bodies are inseparable, then our faith becomes more rooted. It isn't simply an add-on to our minds. A sort of 'app' that we can tap into when we need it. The fact that we are created, physical

beings, means that our encounter with Christ is also bodily. We too, meet Christ when we come to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. We too, encounter Christ, in our physical movement, our speaking, our singing, our listening, our greeting of one another, our sharing of hospitality and offering of service. I feel like this last year we've been persuaded to believe that our bodies are somehow an enemy. That our own bodies are a risk to others, and others bodies a risk to us. Physical bodies have become something to fear, to mistrust, to be distanced from, to slather with anti bacteriael. And of course, there's been good reason to at heed to the guidance to help prevent the spread of Coronavirus. But as people of faith, I believe it's really important to reaffirm the essential goodness of our created bodies, and the capacity they offer as God breathed vessels, both to enable our flourishing, but the work of God in and through us.

So what difference does the resurrection make? We are people of physical breath but also of spiritual breath. The same breath of life is the breath of God which enables us to encounter God in a new way. That enables our hearts and minds and eyes to be opened, and to make that encounter. Perhaps it is of great comfort that the disciples, even those who had journeyed with the earthly Jesus for some time, did not see that it was him when he met them on the road to Emmaus. But we can hear his frustration speaking through the disciples even to us: "Oh how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared." And of course he is right! It is the in the bodily encounter with the risen Christ that suddenly all those words of the prophets, and even of Jesus himself, are somehow breathed back into life. The dry bones, of which Ezekiel prophesies, come to life. The moment of fresh revelation and understanding is profoundly bodily, and life changing. As Rowan Williams has said, The resurrected Christ is the light by which we are able to see clearly.

And so perhaps if we remember that the breath of God which formed us, and sustains our physical lives, is also the breath of God which forms and sustains our spiritual lives, then the resurrection is the means by which we somehow integrate the two. No longer do we see our bodies as mortal, insignificant vessels to carry us through to our death. They are the means by which our spiritual breath, our understanding of who God is and what He has done for us, is enabled to find expression. The resurrection makes it possible for our eyes to be opened, for our hearts to burn within, and to know that both sides of the grave, God gives us physical bodies as a means of grace by which we encounter His love and share it with others.

We are people of mind and flesh and spirit. And all of it is given to us by God, who from the beginning has breathed life, and wisdom, and truth, and meaning, and revelation. And who now, through the triumph of His Son our Saviour Jesus Christ over sin and death, breathes a peace and a joy and hope to us from beyond the grave, so that we can live now in the assurance of the fullness of life for all eternity.

So, friends, go this Easter with your hearts burning within you – so that like the disciples you are equipped with the fire and passion to tell others of the extraordinary truth that the Son of God came to earth, and died, and rose again, defeating sin and death and all the powers of hell, so that we too, mind, flesh and spirit may live beyond the grave in God's eternal Kingdom.

Amen