

Bennochy church 17th April 2016

Here is a trivia question for you. Apart from Jesus, how many other people were said to be raised from death in the bible?

There are eight specific stories of resurrection: Elijah and the son of the widow of Zarephath, Elisha and the son of a Shunammite woman; a dead man who comes to life after touching the bones of Elisha, Jesus raised the widows son at Nain, Jarius's daughter and of course Lazarus. Peter raised Tabitha, that is our story for today and Eutychus who fell asleep while Paul preached, and fell out of a third story window!

So it is not as unusual as you might have first thought. These are the ones we know about, there may have been many more.

Now we might debate as to whether these people were actually dead or not, medical practice and knowledge was very different in biblical times, but for the purposes of this morning, let's take these stories at face value.

If Lazarus was a fore taste of what was to come, then miracles like the raising of Tabitha confirmed what had already happened to Jesus. Sandwiched in-between these miracles is the Easter story. That is the point. I want to suggest that resurrection was not a one off event confined to what happened to Jesus. God's power over life has always been, as clearly demonstrated in the Old Testament, and for the people who bore witness to this miracle, resurrection was understood

as part of the life of faith. The power of God and the reality of human life becoming one. The power of God was now real and earthed in the very fabric and substance of their lives.

The biblical writers always had a purpose for their stories. They were not writing history. They were telling the story of God and his people, and that story was very often, a struggle. The biblical miracles were not an event, they were a message from God. As a result of the miracle of raising Tabitha, we are told that many people believed in the Lord. God does not demonstrate power over life, he does not break the natural order for no purpose.

Having said all that. I am glad my faith did not come as a result of such a miracle.

One of my favourite passages of scripture is Hebrews 11: 1-1. It says, *To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. It was by their faith that people of ancient times won God's approval. It is by faith that we understand that the universe was created by God's word, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen.* Faith is based on hope and the certainty of what cannot be seen.

Think of the story of Thomas. That unique touch of the wound of Christ that made him believe, but what did Jesus say to Thomas, *happy are those who believe without seeing me.* Miracles by themselves can never stand alone. If they do; faith is weak, because it is dependent on what is seen and touched.

When we think of resurrection we are naturally drawn to Easter, but for a moment, let us widen our understanding and remember this; for these resurrected people, the experience of death was still to come. It not something they can escape from. For them alone the unique experience of dying twice. And that says something to me. There is more to new life in Christ than examples of resurrection. It is not normal to be bodily raised from the dead! So let's not expect it to happen to us!

Heaven can be an attractive option. I have no idea what that experience will be. There is the temptation to look ahead and think of new life in Christ only as an end point. Yet the beauty of being a pilgrim, is the journey itself. To look around at where we are and see who is journeying with us. To stay in the moment and in that moment, trust God. Life is to be lived, and our resurrection experience has to be lived in the world. Tabitha found herself back in the world and that is where we are. I repeat again the Christian Aid strap line - *we believe in life before death*. The Christian experience is resurrection *before* death. That is where we differ from Tabitha.

I think our experience of resurrection is nearer the experience of Saul on the Damascus road. Part of life's journey where God stops us in our tracks, enters our soul, our very being. That is resurrection and is far more important to God than seeking only our place in heaven, wherever that is. It is after resurrection, we run the race of faith and keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. It

is new life lived in an old world, seeking first not our place in heaven, but the Kingdom of God on earth. *May your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. That is the challenge of living. Faith on earth. That is life, life in all its fullness. For all our resurrected heroes, like Tabitha, life, still had to be lived for God.

Let us see God in the resurrection moments of everyday life. Let us walk the journey, answering to the call of Jesus, *come follow me*. And let experience the 'deep' spirit of God that offers peace, faith and hope. Amen.