

“Death is a full stop to life, not a comma!” That is what my theology professor taught us as we discussed the resurrection.

Both my parents are dead. I understand the full stop of their death. It is utterly irreversible. So too the death of Jesus. Beaten and crucified, he was dead and then buried. Full stop.

So death is not just like the transition between waking and sleeping, even though we often hear of it spoken as such. That is a comma. Death is the utter full stop. Irreversible.

When I was in my late teens I had left home and was studying at University. I had taken my Confirmation Bible with me and began, wisely this time, to read at the start of the New Testament. I thought it would be interesting, informative and helpful to me. I read books with a sense of seeing the story unfold, rather like an internal movie playing in my head. So it was as I read the Gospel of Matthew, the first one. I believed in God, in Jesus, in the resurrection in much the same way as I believed in democracy, in a round earth, in evolution and so forth. These beliefs were the given, uncontested ideas we all carry around with us, or I carried around. What changed my life was that the Jesus character in the Matthew movie, as I read, suddenly turned and looked into my personal “camera lens” and began to speak to me. It was that he could see me, through space and time, and he knew I was there. He knew me. He spoke directly to me. The words he had in the text he spoke to me. I knew that this Jesus of history, of faith, of theology, who had died with a final full stop, was alive in the here-and-now of my life.

Jesus Lives!

I have no need at all for Jesus to have a body, and if “they” somehow found a body and could prove it to be Jesus’, buried in Palestine it would not affect my knowing Jesus lives one jot. Jesus lives! Praise God!

I want you to notice something about the stories of the resurrection in the four Gospels, and something about mine. The Gospels tell almost identical stories of the Passion, but very different ones of the appearances of Jesus. I think that is because the appearances were very personal. Jesus appears to people in individual ways, often around meals, or in distress, or when lost and confused. Each appearing is tailored. Jesus’ appearances are not like robo-calls from politicians designed to deceive and manipulate. They are not one-size-fits-all. They are individual, specific communications of love. Very personal. Jesus’ words to me were for me and me alone, in that place of my life, and at the time he spoke them.

Resurrection, I conclude, is about love.

“God is love. Those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.” says Scripture.

What was it in Jesus that rose again? It was not his Jewishness, for people have experienced him speaking to them in their own tongue and in their own body-type, skin, hair and cultural identity. It was not his actual body that rose, because actual bodies do not appear and disappear or pass through locked doors.

I think (and this is just me) that it is the essence of the divine, which is love, that rose again.

And here I perhaps depart from the teaching of my professor about the “final full stop”.

I have the feeling that you cannot kill God. And the part of us that is made of love is made of God. It is the "image of God" in which we are made. (Genesis)

So there is something raised up in each of us, which is continuous, broken by a comma. It is that part of us utterly driven by love. Perhaps all the parts driven by lesser motives will be "refined away" in fire or something, so that only the gold of love remains.

What remains of my parents for me, the "alive" parts of them in my heart, are the loving parts. I have little movies that arise in memory, often unsought, and I am delighted and warmed by them because they are moments of love. I think everyone, even the broken, twisted and filled with anger and hate, must have some little specks of love still remaining in their souls. I have a belief, based on Jesus' repeated attraction to the skuzzy characters, that God thinks this too. Perhaps the Saints are very full of God because they cultivated love in their lives. Perhaps others are less full. But I think whatever there is of love within you gets "raised up".

Today is the last day for us in St Giles' Church. We remember all that was good and wonderful, spirit-filled and coloured by love.

We remember all those people who loved us and have died. We recall them in love and in loving. We have no knowledge ourselves of most who die in the violence and brutality of war. Not defeat, not victory, neither fame nor infamy, not judgement, not success do we seek out. We look back in remembrance, we look back for love to speak to us. We look back at periods of war in which, although we utterly failed as nations, individuals displayed the marks of love, compassion, faithfulness, mercy, courage and self-sacrifice. The marks of enduring love.

Today, I think, with God, we go into memory and reach back through time and space to look with eyes of love and to seek love looking back at us.

And this is the work of the faithful, because we look back for love in order to catch glimpses of the image of God. We look for his clues that will lead us onward to himself. If we wish to inherit eternal life then we begin by living it now. Eternal life is life lived in the love of God and of our neighbour and of our own selves. It is life lived in God, who is love, and in whose loving image we are fashioned, and called to reflect.

All of our existence comes to a full stop in death. But the image of God in us, the light of love, pauses in a coma, and we are caught up like sparks rising in the flame of divine love into the mystery of eternity in light.