

Death is needed for resurrection. The old must die for the new to arise

There is a story of a dog, who, running out of a kitchen with a stolen sausage in his mouth, sees a steak lying on the floor.....

The last two weeks at Grace Church have been transformative, exhausting, great fun, very stressful, muscle and joint aching, uncertain and have floated on faith. I have felt “in charge” of the move, but not “in control”. It was not until midway through the glorious concert last night that I grasped, deeply in faith, that we are here and so is God.

The work of many hands, many trusting souls, all struggling together to unravel the inevitable chaos of a move, have made the church you are sitting in.

That work of the last weeks sits upon the months of work by architects at Larkin, builders at Dalton, and oversight by the Diocese of Toronto. And the solid faithfulness of your Wardens and Treasurer, Parish Council and the leadership of this church.

Again, all through the process I never knew with any certainty, that this building project would ever end, or come out at all well.

And all the moving effort, all the building work, rests upon the faithful courage of the people who dared to end the lives of the churches of St Crispin, Epiphany, St George, and St Giles.

Courage allowed risk, which called forth faith and trust, which leads you into uncertainty, and that requires work and commitment and huge effort, all of which is stressful and is the *only* route to something as wonderful as this new church building.

This too is the story of death and resurrection.

We sometimes say, “We believe in the resurrection of the dead” in the creed. We don’t say, “We believe that once upon a time Jesus died and rose from death, but that was a long time ago.”

Every year, at the end of the Church’s Year, we have this celebration of the Reign of Christ the King.

The Gospel tells of the death of Jesus, and the Epistle tells of his Resurrected Power.

This man who dared to live his life unswervingly following his trust that by utter truthfulness, unflinching declaration of his understanding of God his Father, and his refusal to resort to rejection of others, he would be safe in God’s love....this man ended up brutally executed. He died and was buried.

Yet his followers then, and since then, in every age and all over the world, have experienced his presence alive and filled with grace. This is how Paul describes the vitality of Jesus.

*May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power,
and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the
Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.*

*He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved
Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether

thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.

He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven,
by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

It is by letting go, by dying to something we long to cling onto, that we are promised to get it back, transformed, glorified, amazingly graced by the process of resurrection.

(When Lucy and I were dating, it was bumpy. I already loved her, and yet I could see so many difficulties ahead. I wanted her so badly, and I couldn't assure myself of the safety, or of avoiding the risks of committing myself in love. After a weekend together (we lived in different cities) I prayed and prayed about this, and then came, exhausted, to the place where I said to God. "I give her up! I let go! If she is mine then it has to be You that gives her to me, and me to her." 34 years later it is good and getting ever better. Our love is part of my experience of resurrection.)

To live every day in the mystery of the risen king who was dead and broken is too hard for most of us most of the time. But this is the truth we live with at the edge of our vision. It is this belief that our God is a God of resurrection that allows, and encourages us to take the kind of dying risk that was necessary for the new Grace Church to arise.

So it is appropriate that the cross which looks down upon us when we meet for worship is just at the edge of our vision. Before us always is the light of the Good Shepherd, but up and to the North is the Cross of Christ the King.

This first Sunday, this new beginning is blessed by this symbol of the good news of resurrection that follows willing death.

When you come in here, look up at the cross. (You have to decide to look up, this cross will never be in front of your face.)

Look and remember

that life is given to those who can die,

that joy comes to those who are ready to suffer,

and that God can only hold your hand when it is empty and unclenched.

Then you will live in the resurrection,

and the way of the cross will become for you the path of life,

and you will be in the kingdom where the Crucified One reigns in Glory.