



Sermon: 12 April 2026

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Interpreting the Resurrection

I have no doubt the resurrection occurred but how people have interpreted major aspects of the Cross and Resurrection varies widely.

I want to explore a number of these interpretations and hope you will draw your own conclusions also.

Our readings for this first Sunday after Easter contain overtones as to how the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, can be interpreted.

In our John 20 reading, the resurrection of Jesus outlines:

- How the fear of the disciples behind locked doors is overcome
- And how Jesus guarantees the power of the Holy Spirit being available
- Also, how the doubt of Thomas is overcome
- And how a true life is guaranteed by belief in Jesus.

From our 1 Peter reading, the resurrection emphasis is how a Living Hope is guaranteed which results in new birth, an imperishable inheritance, ongoing protection until the last or end times and, above all, power to endure suffering and trials and achieve the ultimate salvation of one's soul.

All good stuff, but where does that leave us with definite alternatives as to how we interpret the Cross & Resurrection for ourselves?

Both readings underline that life in Christ triumphs over death.

Death, of course, still exists and is a natural part of life. Without death the world would be overrun with people and even more unsustainable than it is today.

Death generally gets a bad press and when it occurs prematurely, justifiably so. But when people die in the fullness of life after a reasonably long and fulfilling life what is there to object to?

Death can be feared but it can also be welcomed.

When I was in ministry in Nelson, I chaired the Interchurch Hospital Chaplaincy committee, and I had difficulty, and still do, with the practice of chaplains sprinkling consecrated water in rooms where someone in the fullness of life had died; and not only the room but the corridors and lift in which the deceased travelled to the hospital mortuary.

Understandable when a life has unfortunately been cut short as in an infant's death or an unforeseen traffic accident or a drowning, but overall, why the bad rap for death over and against life?

And in saying that resurrection triumphs over death, what kind of life are we talking about?

Life here or life beyond, or both?

Although Jesus is reported as saying such things as "In my father's house are many rooms" and "Where I go, you shall go also", I remain a little agnostic about an after-life.

Part of me questions as to whether it is a little bit selfish of me to expect to live on for ever and ever, amen!

I appreciate the indigenous belief in the presence and availability of ancestors, mirrored in the Christian statement of belief in the Communion of Saints but should I really expect the Divine presence to attend to me closely in an after-life given all the worries I have already given the same Divine presence in the here and now?

The thought of an after-life crowded with so many other souls doesn't appeal either.

I think heaven for me is more of a state of wellbeing here and now with God and with each other than a geographical destination somewhere else.

My priority is on living as sound a life of service and wellbeing in the here and now rather than counting on too much after death.

If there is an after-life, it could be a welcome bonus but not something I'm banking on.

Having said that, there is an understandable belief for many in a compensatory or substitutional resurrection and after-life. If life for many has been so horrific and unfulfilling, doesn't a just God provide an after-life that is some compensation for a rotten here and now existence?

An allied version of what resurrection can mean is the Sacrificial Atonement theory, that Jesus was sent by God to die for our sins and died for them and then rose above them. This theory relies on a capricious God who sacrificed His Son for our salvation and wellbeing.

I personally don't believe in such a God, and the sacrificial idea arises largely from the Old Testament/Jewish Scriptures emphasis on Temple sacrifice to offset one's sins and especially the sacrifice of a lamb. So, Jesus in this theory becomes the sacrificial lamb.

A related theory is that Jesus died to pay a ransom for our sins. But again, the theory begs the question as to whom the ransom is paid? Surely not to the Devil if you believe in one and surely not to a capricious God.

In direct contrast to the sacrificial and ransom theories is the belief I have that the resurrection above all, illustrates the unconditional love of God that Christ Jesus portrays in both the cross and resurrection.

"For God so loved the world..." Not that He gave His Son, but that His Son freely and willingly portrayed both in life and death, the great love of God for all humanity.

Jürgen Moltmann, a German Protestant theologian writes of a Theology of Hope based on the love of Christ for all humanity.

Resurrection in that sense is meant for all humanity; indeed for the total creation. The Cross represents the worst of humanity; sinful individuals and sinful structures. The Resurrection, on the other hand, represents a hope for all humanity and all creation; individuals yes, but also society and creation as a whole.

I think it was Rosemary Ruether, a feminist theologian who wrote of the inward and outward expression of love; of how Jesus imbibed the inward love of God and expressed it in unconditional love for others.

And that is the model of resurrection I believe we are called to; imbibing the love of God in Christ and as resurrected and new life individuals and communities of faith, letting it flow outwards from us in love based justice and peace.

So as a resurrected community of love and grace what does that mean for us here at Knox?

Hopefully as individuals, a sense of being recipients of God's love and resurrected grace.

And as a community of faith?

- A continuing acknowledgement that we are an inclusive community where all are welcome and truly are.
- That we are also accommodating of other communities like Alcoholics Anonymous, Tangata Atumotu, the Russian Orthodox.
- Our outreach to Pillars, caring for the families of prisoners.
- Outreach also to Te Whare Roimata as they provide critical support to those in critical need in Linwood and Richmond. Support also for Te Whare keeping open the Post Shop & community centre in Linwood.
- Submissions also to Parliamentary sub committees on Treaty related matters.

- And most importantly, hosting and supporting other church and community groups as we have done for forums organised by EcuAction and 'Walking for the Planet'.
- And internally working on our own spirituality and understandings through Bible Study, Meditation and Shalom after church sessions.
- Not forgetting either Peter & Joyce Majendie's artistic displays and the inspiration that the Knox singers and Jeremy's giftedness repeatedly offer and the quality of worship Matthew never fails to deliver and the pastoral care he shares, complemented by that of Linda and Norman Wilkins, and the administrative wisdom of both the Parish Council and of Lynda in the church office.

Such are the marks of a resurrection community that draws its inspiration and power from the presence of the resurrected Christ at our centre; powering us through the Holy Spirit in acts of loving service and witness.

That's the form of resurrection I believe in and that's what faith communities exist to be.

So that's some of my thinking on resurrection and no doubt you have your thoughts also, so do chat about it over morning tea in here, and possibly Len & Susan, the discussion could continue in a future Shalom session in the lounge?

So be it,

AMEN