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The resurrection - myth or miracle - or a bit of both?

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ

I have just returned from performance of three rarely seen operas by Rossini, in his home town/city of Pesaro. Talk about myth. Not letting the truth get in the way of a good story, as Mark Twain expressed it. But the nature of history has always been to record it from one point of view or another - rarely is the accuracy emphasised. But the basic story is usually there in some form or another.

Dare one suggest, in this august journal of the OSJ, that the resurrection narrative has a few unanswered questions though the story of our redemption, the fulfilment of the crucifixion sacrifice and the assurance 'of heaven hereby' Christians seek, believe they know, and believe in spite of doubt and uncertainty. We have to start somewhere with the story and we have to end at a point which satisfies us and gives us peace as well as faith and hope.

Nonetheless there is no problem in having doubts or expressing them. The actual words, loosely translated by generations of scholars, carry errors and variations long since debated and discoursed for our edification.

The European churches I dive into and quickly escape from, with their gloom and doom, their garish and bloody effigies and paintings, are enough to frighten the peasants into believing what the church taught them, enough to bring them into blind obedience to the faith they held allegiance to. Don't frighten the horses and don't rock the boat!

We live in a freer society where questions, as I know from teaching Sixth Formers as Chaplain and RS/Faith Studies teacher of years, cannot be fobbed off but need knowledgeable and acceptable solutions, if not so many absolute answers. Tradition and translation for a modern faith is a balance.

Nobody can come back to life after it is dead, as no virgin can give birth in the human species. Walking on water and changing water into wine, restoring corroded limbs and sightless eyes are all, we know, impossible. Yet as with the miracle stories, the resurrection narrative tests our credibility to its human limits.

Roman floggings customarily reduced the already emaciated prisoner to a state of inanimity/inanimateness - appearance of death - yet not dead. Many died from the floggings alone.

Those who suspect that is what happened to Our Lord fail to note that nailing then to the cross, the breathlessness and chest pain caused by the hanging body, not to mention the piercing of the side of a prisoner and blood and water flowing out - breaking others' legs also - and being just before the Sabbath when dying prisoners had to be speedily despatched and removed for sanctity and Jewish law, meant the haste with which this particular

punishment was carried out might well have been unchecked but is, for fear of Roman soldiers themselves being punished for getting any aspect of the execution wrong, is surely a case for definite death.

The 'last temptation' for a godhead to step down from the cross and 'save himself and us' is declined and He dies alongside criminals deserving of death on their own admission. Today the penitent thief would be with The Lord in paradise.

An experienced guide I used for my Holy Land tours for a number of years gave insight as to the 'swaddling bands carried by travelling Jewish families; they were not, he said, for baby's birth but to swathe the family member who died en route, often escaping persecution, until they reached a place to bury their loved one decently and safely. Such bands used as graveclothes were noted in the rock burial chamber such as one can see today in The Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, not far from St George's Cathedral. The great stone covering the tomb would itself be airtight to conceal the stench of death until 'the women' could come with aromatic spices to clear that smell, in this case of an abused and traumatised body. The selected squad of Roman soldiers were to ensure the stone was not moved, on pain of execution themselves if they failed, especially in this case of a 'celebrated' and controversial victim, the authorities feared 'might rise, as he had said'.

On the third day the women found that the huge stone sealing the tomb had been rolled away [Mk 16:1-8]. The Roman guards had been frightened off earlier when they saw that the stone had been moved 'by an angel' [Mt 28: 2-

4]. Without a body to guard they fled in fear of their lives [Mt 28:11-15]. So why was the tomb empty?

'The swoon', 'the theft' and the 'wrong tomb' theories have all been debated to almost ludicrous degrees. As above we accept He was 'really' dead. To get out of tightly binding grave clothes and remove the great stone from the inside are incredible to believe, and to slip past guards?

Come on! Guards who faced execution for failing in their duty.

Theft?

That the disciples stole the body to claim Jesus was raised. Or that the Jewish authorities stole the body. Each of these is fraught with difficulties.

The wrong tomb?

No, as specifically that belonging to Joseph of Arimathea - locatable and not many to choose from. and a posse of guards a bit obvious do you not think?

No reference either of the male disciples having to ask the women about the location.

And after the resurrection it was a physical and tangible person who walked and ate with the disciples on the road to Emmaus and also to groups of people, once over 500 at one time [1 Cor. 15:3-8]

Now any of the above may not have convinced you and many may still be sceptic. Doubts may remain.

My bottom line is that the disciples, from being in hiding and scared of being sought out and killed by the same authorities who killed their Lord, suddenly became emboldened and they fulfilled the command of going into all the world to preach the gospel. Something convinced them and changed them despite the persecutions which followed, to tell the story as we now know it.

Mmmm, I think that is good enough for me. And you.....?

I started this debate with questioning of miracles and saying they are not essential to my faith, nor to the godhead of my Lord, but for many they do demonstrate the Power of the Eternal in changing course of creation and promoting the Son of God who rules with His Father in Glory.

If that helps any of you to justify these stories then maybe I have helped you think a bit more outside the box. It is a good story, however it is told, and we are unlikely to get better explanations this side of Heaven.

May it be so, for His Name's sake. AMEN.

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ.

The Resurrection: Paul R. Williamson

DEFINITION

Resurrection refers to the raising of the dead, although not just in terms of mere bodily reanimation. Biblically it may refer to either spiritual or physical transformation, the former concurrent with regeneration and the latter with re-embodiment on the last day.

SUMMARY

This essay explores the biblical hope of resurrection: how it is foreshadowed in the Old Testament (esp. [Dan 12](#)), and further anticipated or proclaimed in the New Testament. The theological significance of the relationship between Jesus' physical resurrection and the resurrection experience(s) of believers, as well as the nature of the resurrection body is then examined, particularly in relation to the concept of an immediate resurrection at death.

As the closing words of the Apostle's Creed remind us, orthodox Christianity has always affirmed "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Indeed, these are two crucial and related facets of Christian hope or eschatology. In biblical thought, death is not a welcome friend that ushers us into the "wide blue yonder." Rather, death is the last enemy which, though already conquered by Jesus, awaits its final defeat on the coming day when God destroy "the covering [or shroud] that is cast over all peoples ... [and] swallow up death forever" ([Isa 25:7–8a](#); cf. [1Cor 15:54–57](#)).

What Christians ultimately hope for, therefore, is not a disembodied existence in an extraterrestrial place called heaven, but resurrection life in a new (i.e. renewed) creation, where “God himself will be with them as their God” ([Rev 21:3](#)). And this prospect of eternal life (life of the age to come) has been secured “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” ([1Pet 1:3](#)). Indeed, as the Apostle Paul underlines, the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of believers are inextricably linked ([1Cor 15:12–28](#)).

The Hope of Resurrection Foreshadowed

The Old Testament has relatively little to say about the hope of resurrection, but God is clearly presented as sovereign over both life and death. The latter is attested in the song of Moses, where God claims to both “kill and ... make alive” ([Deut 32: 39](#)), and in a similar vein in the song of Hannah, who acknowledges that “the LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.” ([1Sam 2:6](#)). Both the sequence (kill[s] ... make/brings alive) and parallelism (kills/brings down to Sheol ... brings to life/raises up) suggest that God’s power to raise the dead is on view here, rather than simply an ability to rescue wounded or sick people from a premature death. Neither Moses nor Hannah is claiming that God has raised the dead or will do so; only that such is within his sovereign power, should it be deemed desirable or necessary (cf. [Gen 22:5](#); [Heb 11:19](#)). While neither speaker had personal experience of such power to raise the dead, this was subsequently demonstrated through both Elijah and Elisha (cf. [1Kgs 17:17–24](#); [2Kgs 4:18–37](#); [13:20–21](#)). Thus at least the germ of resurrection hope is arguably reflected in early Israelite theology and experience.

Much more explicit resurrection language is expressed in subsequent OT books, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. While [Isaiah 25:7–9](#) may be employing the idea of death’s abolition metaphorically, the imagery seems to suggest more than national restoration in 26:19; given the marked contrast with the fate of the wicked in 26:14, individual resurrection is arguably on view. However, this is plainly not the case in [Ezekiel 37](#), where the resurrection of the dry bones portrays Israel’s physical restoration from metaphorical death in exile. Even so, the rhetorical force of Ezekiel’s reassurance here is largely dependent on the plausibility of the idea: resurrection would be an inappropriate and unpersuasive metaphor if it were considered utterly impossible. But however the concept is employed by Isaiah and Ezekiel, there is little doubt over its significance in [Daniel 12](#). Here those “awakened” are physically dead (“sleep in the dust of the earth”), resurrection has eternal consequences (“some awake to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt”), and the faithful (“wise/those who turn many to righteousness”) are gloriously transformed (“shine ... like stars”). While arguably falling short of the universal eschatological prospect envisaged in subsequent Jewish and Christian thought, this text unquestionably reflects the most developed Old Testament support for “the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

The Prospect of Resurrection Anticipated

During the intertestamental period belief in a future resurrection of the dead became more widely embraced within Judaism. Clearly there were some, like the Sadducees, who resisted the idea ([Mark 12:18–27](#); [Acts 23:8](#); cf. Sirach 38:21), not only because they considered it absurd but because they found no

support for such teaching in the Law of Moses (i.e. the Pentateuch). However, other evidence from the Hellenistic era (e.g., the Greek translation of the relevant Old Testament texts; explicit mention in 2 Maccabees; implicit attestation in the Wisdom of Solomon, 1 Enoch and other Jewish texts) and the New Testament (e.g., [Luke 14:14](#); [John 11:24](#); [Acts 23:6–9](#)) suggests that the idea of a physical resurrection as an eschatological event had become a fairly standard Jewish belief by the first century. Accordingly, for many if not most Jews, Jesus' teaching on resurrection would have been radical or unintelligible only insofar as it anticipated such an event prior to the last day (e.g., [Mark 9:9–10](#); [Luke 24:45–46](#); [John 2:19–20](#); [5:24–26](#); [20:9](#)).

However, as well as anticipating a spiritual resurrection for his followers ([John 5:25](#)) and an imminent physical resurrection for himself ([Luke 9:21–22](#)), Jesus clearly endorsed the more traditional concept as well: an eschatological resurrection of the dead ([Luke 11:31–32](#); [20:34–38](#); [John 5:28–29](#); [6:39–58](#); cf. [John 12:48](#)). Indeed, such an event is prefigured in some of his miracles, most notably the raising of Jairus' daughter ([Mark 5:35–43](#)), the widow of Nain's son ([Luke 7:11–17](#)), and his friend Lazarus ([John 11:1–44](#)). While none of these constitutes resurrection in the fullest biblical sense (i.e., being raised to immortal life), like their Old Testament counterparts they foreshadow this eschatological reality. As such, it is arguably problematic to construe the latter as being anything less than a reanimation of the dead involving significant continuity between their natural (mortal) and their spiritual (immortal) bodies. Such a conclusion is further suggested by Paul's anticipation of "the redemption of our bodies" ([Rom 8:23](#)), as well as the resurrection body of Jesus himself ([John 20:27](#)).

The Fact of Resurrection Proclaimed

For New Testament authors, Jesus' resurrection is not only archetypal, but guarantees the future resurrection of believers ([Acts 26:23](#); 1Cor 6:14; 15:20, 23; [2Cor 4:14](#); [Col 1:18](#); [Rev 1:5](#)), who are united to him both in his death and resurrection ([Rom 5:9–11](#); [6:3–5](#), [8–11](#); [8:11](#); [Col 2:12](#); [3:1](#); cf. [Rev 20:4–6](#)). While in some measure Christians experience the future now (i.e., the life of the coming age), the complete and untarnished reality awaits the last day, when “the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” ([1Cor 15:52](#)). This and other New Testament passages (e.g., [Acts 24:14–15](#); [1Thess 4:16–17](#); [Phil 3:20–21](#); [Rev 20:11–15](#)) plainly associate the future resurrection of the dead with the Lord's return and the final judgment. The idea of an immediate post-mortem resurrection experience is difficult to correlate with this. Advocates of an instantaneous “resurrection” must therefore look elsewhere to defend such a concept (principally, [2Cor 5:1–10](#)), and conclude that over time the apostle Paul must have changed his mind. The main difficulty with this, however, is that Paul's teaching on this matter is consistent across all his letters—including those written *after* 2 Corinthians, such as Romans and Philippians. Moreover, [2 Corinthians 5](#) is not indisputably suggesting that believers receive their resurrected bodies the moment they die. The loss of our earthly tent (mortal body) and the acquisition of our eternal house (resurrection body) are not necessarily simultaneous, especially if “being at home with the Lord” ([2Cor 5:8](#)) equates with “being away from the body” ([2Cor 5:6](#)) or being “unclothed” ([2Cor 5:4](#)). Thus understood, Paul has two post-mortem scenarios in mind in this passage: our final, resurrected state ([2Cor 5:1–5](#)), and our interim, disembodied state prior to this ([2Cor 5:6–9](#)). While the nature of the latter (being with the Lord) allows Paul somewhat

reluctantly to welcome death, his ultimate Christian hope is to be clothed with his heavenly dwelling (the immortal clothing of his resurrection body). Paul provides his most detailed discussion of the latter in his earlier letter.

The Nature of the Resurrection Body and Life Everlasting

In response to the cynicism of resurrection skeptics in the Corinthian church, Paul reflects on the nature of the resurrection body in [1 Corinthians 15:35–57](#).

While not denying some degree of continuity with the natural body, Paul's emphasis here is clearly on the discontinuity between the mortal body inherited from the first Adam and the immortal body secured through the second Adam. He illustrates such by noting:

- The difference between the seed sown and the plant produced (vv. 37–38);
- The different types of 'flesh' and 'bodies' even in the natural realm (vv.39–41).

He then underlines the differences between the natural and the spiritual body in vv. 42–49 as follows:

- The body buried ("sown") is perishable, but raised imperishable.
- The body is buried in dishonor, but is raised in glory.
- The body is sown (buried) in weakness, but is raised in power.

In short, the resurrection body will be like that of Christ ([1Cor 15:49](#); cf. [Phil 3:20–21](#)).

Paul is not suggesting that resurrection or "spiritual" bodies will be non-physical, but rather that the natural body inherited from Adam is unsuitable for an eternal inheritance because it is subject to decay ([1Cor 15:50](#)). This is why everyone must undergo change—even those who have not experienced death before the last day must undergo the kind of transformation effected through resurrection to be suitably "attired" for their eternal inheritance

(vv.51–53). While Paul is clearly thinking here only in terms of Christians, it is clear from elsewhere that he understood the eschatological resurrection and final judgment to encompass all humanity ([Rom 2:5–16](#); [Acts 17:31](#); [24:15](#)). What kind of body the resurrected wicked will have is nowhere spelt out, but presumably it must likewise be suitable for their eternal fate, however this is understood.

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Opinion from within the house:

Original source text Rev Calvin Robinson, additional comment Jack Walters

A vast majority of Church of England priests believe ‘Britain can no longer be described as a Christian country’, a new Times survey revealed today. Well, what are they (the CofE) doing about it?

Pontificating over whether we should call God ‘our Father’ in the Lord’s Prayer; promoting transgender persons to the position of archdeacon; pinning Pride flags on the altar; hosting drag queens in the sanctuary.

Everything, but evangelising the nation.

As Christians, we are all called to disciple the nations. That is one of the primary vocations of deacons, priests and bishops. Instead, it seems the Church of England is obsessed with adapting to the social norms of the secular world around it. Why disciple the nation, when you can let the nation disciple you?

A majority of those surveyed said they believed the Church should change its teaching on gay marriage in the church, sex outside of marriage and women's roles in the church. The Church does not have the authority to change its teaching on these issues, they are doctrinal.

Either the Church of England professes to be Christian, or it does not. Either she adhered to the Creeds, or she leaves the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

There is no update feature in the faith, there is no capability for the Church to 'get with the times.'

The Church follows Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, both of which teach that sex outside of marriage is a sin, marriage is between one man and one woman, and priestly ministry is a role for men.

The Scriptures also warns us against false teachers and wolves in sheep's clothing who would lead their flocks astray. These priests had better repent, return to their Bible, for the good of their own souls, but also for the good of the nation.

Although in modern parlance they have become synonymous, the Church of England is not in line with her 'Anglican' brethren. In Kigali earlier this year, the global primates representing 85 per cent of the Anglican Communion met in great sadness to declare that unless the Church of England and her leadership repents, they would no longer see the Archbishop of Canterbury as the first among equals.

The Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) reminded the See of Canterbury of its duty to the English folks, to proclaim the Gospels, and to turn away from the false gospel of wokeness.

Sex before marriage is fornication, sex outside of marriage is adultery, homosexual sex is sodomy. These are sins. It is not a kindness to affirm sinful lifestyles, however contemporary it may be.

Priests are called to be loving in truthfulness, and their duty is the cure of souls – that means leading souls to Christ, to be saved. By encouraging extra-marital sex and homosexual acts, these modern priests are knowingly leading souls toward Hell. Eternal damnation awaits any so-called teacher of the faith who preaches acceptance of what God has called abominable.

It is worth bearing in mind that there are many faithful clergy in the Church of England. Of the 5,000 priests contacted, only 1,200 replied to the survey.

Perhaps the orthodox priests were busy ministering to their flocks, whilst the 'woke wolves' replied to their emails.

It becomes clearer by the week, with every false pronouncement, that the Church of England is in a managed decline, and that the current hierarchy are not interested in saving it, or even saving souls, but in leaving behind a perfectly embalmed liberal corpse.

If there is a future for Christianity in England, it will come from a united front from the small-o orthodox faithful.

The old dividing lines of Evangelical and Catholic will fall away, as orthodox Christians across denominations unite around defence of the Christian faith as it comes under assault from the so-called liberal progressives, whose only god is social acceptance, and whose only doctrine is virtue signalling.

England always has been and always will be a Christian country. That does not mean we will always have a Church of England.

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Wedding photographers in church.

Love them or hate them, they are here to stay, but they are not always well tolerated by clergy.

Many are told to stay at the back of the church, not use flash, not move, even told how many photographs they can take. That is because some clergy cannot understand the photographer's ministry and make photographers feel unwelcome and not tolerated when it comes to wedding services.

It seems from general conversation with photographers that women clergy (CofE) are the worst offenders, but that is not so say it is always undeserved.

I have experienced wedding photographers improperly attired for their role dressed in flip flops, Hawaiian shirts, baseball caps, overweight, over-aged to qualify as trendy teenagers and having no concept of the importance of the space they are invading, but they are the exception to the rule.

I have also had experiences of Asian photographers asking what the 'rules' in church are, and then totally ignoring them during a service. Cultural difference can cause some interesting 'misunderstandings' as can professional intentions.

I also know that when photographers get behind their cameras, they often feel invisible and are not aware of their presence and visibility.

It is a well-known fact that photographers in war or conflict zones often become casualties once they get behind their cameras.

But I sympathise with their position.

They have a job to do and the church should take note that they are continuing in a very long and sacred tradition of 'capturing the image'. Something we should do as priests every time we present the Gospel, drawing those people who listen into the moment and creating a reality that cannot be ignored.

From the earliest inception of the church there has been a reliance on the image whether virtual, created or imagined.

Take for example the catacombs and the depictions of church architecture or the first images of saints and martyrs

The eastern orthodox icons.

The marginal illustrations in Codex and prayer books.

The medieval wall paintings and statuary.

Stained glass windows.

Images all intended to take the observer to that person, that moment in time, to that event and that experience, the fullness of emotion and perception, and come to a deeper understanding of particular events and how that affects and builds up their faith.

And wedding photographers continue that tradition which should be honoured and encouraged and supported by clergy.

The results of their work should bring the viewer to that sacred moment when viewed which evokes, the emotion and the feelings of the moment in such a way that it takes them straight back (for example) to the vows, the ring promises and the blessing of both bride and groom.

As a priest I cannot put a price on such a valuable resource for the bride and groom, their family and friends.

I, in my actions as priest, cannot give them such a powerful gift simply because the memories I help create fade and become distant and often become confused in other things.

What can I offer, for example, that takes a bride and groom straight back to that moment they shared their vows and brings to mind the emotion, the words themselves and intent conveyed in the same way?

The answer is simply there is nothing that matches the power of an image.

I am of an age when the image of a small girl, covered in napalm burns, summarises the horrors of the Vietnam War. I vividly recall the destruction of the HMS Sheffield by Exocet missile and the horrific wounds suffered by their crew as they were landed on the beaches. We are all probably thinking of the same images when I recall the destruction of the Twin Towers.

Images are so powerful and they go beyond words and feelings.

To deny this to brides and grooms and their families and friends for the sake of 'good order in church' (personal power and control over the God given ministry of others – think about this very seriously!) is unacceptable.

We also as priests have a duty to support and encourage all forms of ministry, and there is no doubt in my mind that photography is one we need to be much more aware of.

Yes, I agree, some photographers will get it wrong but we have other people to consider, especially brides and grooms and their family and friends. We should not judge and condemn all photographers on the actions of a few who have got it wrong on the day – we have though a responsibility to educate and inform them, just as in any form of ministry.

That is not to say we should not have professional standards.

A dress code where photographers blend into the background and look as if they are guests is not inappropriate and not too much to ask.

Neither is that photographers do not stand between priest and bride and groom or congregation and bride or groom.

This is only good manners and common sense.

The use of flash is also another matter of common sense. I have been subject to a 'Damascus Road' event several times by the thoughtless use of flash, and thrown mid-sentence into confusion. Back lighting or bounced flash causes far less problems for the celebrant and the bride and groom.

In return we can give some ground for the greater good. It's called mutual respect and consideration. I often announce in housekeeping before the service that our photographers and videographers have been given dispensation to move around quite freely so the bride and groom will be able to take away the best possible visual mementoes and reminders of their service.

Generally this is well respected by photographers and videographers and they keep their movements to a useful minimum and cause as little disruption as possible.

In fact, giving them a little responsibility and freedom often results in me being able to let them get on with their job unhindered and them letting me get on with mine a win-win situation for all parties, especially when it comes to end results.

Our conception as priests is often limited by our own narrowness of mind as to what is God given ministry and what isn't.

My suggestion to you is that you should not underestimate the power of the image and that you should encourage all who are involved in this form of ministry so long as it is not detrimental to your own. That said, there should be no room for personal prejudice or unnecessary exertion of personal authority or power over others. We work for the common good, not our own.

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Conversation with a couple.

Yesterday I was getting ready for a wedding blessing and was greeted by a mid-30s couple who were considering marriage and were looking at venues to see what was involved and to get some idea about costs.

They were both of the same mind that there needed to be a strong religious element to their service that reflected their shared faith as they took this momentous step in their relationship. The church and what happened within it was a key and central feature of their day.

I was pretty impressed with their conversation with me. They had been together for over ten years and felt secure enough in their shared relationship to be taking this big step.

They were beyond those early days influenced more by passion and young love that consumed common sense. Their discussion was thoughtful and rational, well considered and full of good humour.

There was none of the constant need that early couples have to be in constant eye contact as if trying to read the unspoken subtext of the other's deepest and most hidden thoughts, the relentless need to be in physical contact in some way, and the insane need to be in mutual agreement over every small detail of their lives.

Dear God, how difficult it is to have a decent conversation with such couples and find out what they each really think or believe.

Thankfully this couple were past all that.

Oh how they celebrated their differences and similarities of thought.

This is what you think, this is what I think, what is best for us? A lesson and example younger couples could learn a lot from.

As a couple, they were genuinely good to be with and I enjoyed every moment of their company.

There were disagreements but these were no threat to their relationship, and it was interesting watching how they dealt with the ebb and flow of ideas and options as they came up in conversation.

They had wanted me to conduct their service and were intensely disappointed that I was firm about retirement. It seemed that the staff at Rudding Park had sung my praises a little too well but accepting of the situation were looking for some other clerical rebel, someone willing to provide a service that met their needs rather than the church's, something that was personal, flexible regarding content and presentation, intimate and not straight off the production line.

I had to explain that in most denominations clergy, whether designated priest, minister or pastor, usually promised to be subject to their superiors authority and denominational canons/traditions as part of their ordination. This meant that they often could only use the prescribed service formats and wordings of the approved liturgies and sacraments.

Some choice, but in reality little choice.

I felt for the couple.

They only asked once about me coming out of retirement to do their service but I explained that if I did then I could hardly refuse the requests of other brides and grooms, and if that was the case, I may as well not retire.

However, I did say I would give them all the help, resources and guidance I could so they could go armed to their eventual celebrant and state their case in an informed and knowledgeable way.

That was appreciated.

The conversation turned to other matters, my thoughts on same sex marriage, gender and sexuality, and the damage being done to children by the current ideology. There was anger and concern voiced by both, and also the frustration that their voice and opinions were disallowed in the current climate.

And then the church began to slowly fill with guests assembling for the prescribed wedding blessing. It was time to part company and I had a service to attend to.

Good to know there are still couples out there approaching marriage in a grown up and considered way.

What it proved to me was marriage in the true sense is not dead, far from it.

That gives me hope for the future.

From +David

For those of us who have been Christians for an amount of time, you may know how it feels to struggle along and to live up to our calling in Jesus. I would guess, you have read His words and those in the rest of Scripture that describes what holiness really looks like. It is so powerful to consider all the ways we ourselves fall short, and when this is our main focus we feel burdened with guilt and that sense of defeat. Instead of living in the freedom, grace, and blessing of our righteous standing in Christ, we try to do the impossible - to be righteous in our own strength and maintain our salvation by human will power and effort.

One thing we must remember, our heavenly Father never intended for you or me to bear this heavy weight, or to doubt the security of our relationship with Him. We can be freed from many concerns and apprehensions by gaining a fuller understanding of all that was accomplished on our behalf at the cross. The New Testament uses three terms to describe God's saving work in our lives. Salvation is justification.

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2).

It is so sad to witness many senior leaders of Christ's holy church spouting out reams of mistaken or not understood theology. I would remind them there is no way we can enjoy a victorious Christian life unless we understand the biblical meaning of justification, because it's the foundation of everything else we believe about salvation. To be justified is to be declared righteous by the Lord. Justification was initiated by God's grace, accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection, and is received by us through faith.

Jesus lived a sinless life and obeyed the God's law perfectly. Then He offered Himself on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sin. When we trust in Christ through faith, God declares us not guilty because Jesus took on our sin and suffered the punishment that we deserved: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Praise God, justification is all of His work and none of ours, due solely to His grace and not our works (Gal. 2:16). The Lord doesn't look down and see some goodness or worthiness in us that warrants salvation (Rom. 3:23-24). On the contrary, there is nothing we can do to make ourselves righteous or acceptable to holy God. The only way to be made righteous is by His amazing grace, through faith in His Son.

Salvation is Sanctification. This too is a work of God on our behalf. "By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). Justification is a legal pronouncement that happened when we came to faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour. Although sanctification began at the same time, it's a process that continues throughout our lives as Christ's righteousness is accomplished in and through us by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

Our position of righteousness can never be changed because Christ's work on the cross cannot be undone. We are reconciled with the Father, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit - forever.

These are the foundational truths to which we must cling whenever sin threatens to entangle us, guilt overwhelms us, and discouragement overshadows our joy in Christ. Even in the midst of defeat, we can be confident that the good work God began in us will be completed by Him as well (Phil. 1:6).

Although God is the one transforming us into His Son's image, we do play a role in the process. The Lord uses a variety of means to mature us, and in order to grow spiritually we must be teachable, yielding to His Spirit and filling our minds with truths from His Word. And in the process, there's comfort in knowing that one day our growth will be complete (Phil. 3:12).

Salvation is glorification. A day is coming when our righteous standing before God will become a living reality. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).

Our battle with sin will be over, and we'll never be burdened with guilt again. We will live eternally in the complete freedom of being personally righteous as well as righteous through Jesus. Until then we walk by faith knowing that we belong to Christ, our sins are forgiven, we've been declared righteous and nothing can separate us from His love. However, tempting as it may seem to rely on justification, ignore sanctification, and live as we please until we're glorified, that is not our goal. On the contrary, we must pursue "the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

Out of gratitude and love, your desire should be to reflect in practice what you are in person. In that way your life will become a display of Christ's character, for your good and His glory.

Remember, there is great comfort in knowing that God has provided everything we need in salvation to both rest in Christ's righteousness and grow in it. Take time to thank and praise Him for His great mercy and grace toward you through Christ Jesus.
Prayerfully Yours,

+David

PRAYER FOR THE SICK AND SUFFERING.

I wish to include a prayer for the sick and suffering at this point. Over the last few weeks I have learned of so many friends and colleagues who are now seriously ill many with terminal illness.

I use the below prayer as it covers all those presently ill and others undergoing invasive surgeries and treatments. Please feel free to use, adapt or add words which have a special meaning for yourself, and in your own case.

"Loving God, we bring before you the sick and suffering of our world.

We pray for those afflicted in body: racked by physical pain, wrestling with disease, enduring painful surgery, or coming to terms with terminal illness.

We pray for those disturbed or troubled in mind: those whose confidence has been crushed, those no longer able to cope with the pressures of daily life, those oppressed by false terrors of the imagination, and those facing the dark despair of depression.

We pray for those afflicted in spirit: all who feel their lives to be empty, or whose beliefs are threatened, or who have lost their faith, or who have become caught up in superstition or the occult.

Living God, reach out through all who work to bring wholeness and healing.
Support and strengthen them in their work.

Grant them wisdom and guidance, strength and support, and the ability to minister something of your care and compassion for all."

In the name of Christ we ask it.

Amen

-oOo-

Heimlich Subdiaphragmatic Pressure

(Jesus said,) "The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

MARK 4:19

It is amazing the questions which people may ask us, especially when they know someone's past! One amazing out of the blue question I was asked on 18th August this year was on the face of it a most simple question, yet having a unique and interesting answer!

The question was, "Why do we slap or pull upwards someone's rib cage area when they are choking? To answer that question I need to explain the history behind this manoeuvre a little more in detail.

Until June 1974, the traditional method for aiding choking victims was slapping them on the back, which tended to push the foreign objects further into the airways. It was Dr Henry Heimlich who used the journal Emergency Medicine to introduce a technique that he called "Subdiaphragmatic Pressure". The person giving aid uses their fist in a firm upward thrust just below the choking victim's rib cage to force air and the food or object from the victim's lungs. Three months later, the method was named the Heimlich manoeuvre by the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Most people would not hesitate to use the Heimlich manoeuvre to help someone who is choking, but too often we don't lift a finger when sin has a stronghold on someone. Jesus listed things that can choke the truth before it bears fruit. Believers sometimes slide into bad attitudes, harmful habits, or wrong actions that choke and hinder God's work in their life. During those times we may be tempted to stand by and watch, but God expects us to come to their aid. He wants us to love one another enough to confront someone who is behaving in a harmful or ungodly way.

When confronting, we have to make sure we use the correct "manoeuvre" Gossiping to others worsens the situation. Legalistic condemnation is ineffective. Self righteousness guarantees deaf ears. We need to follow a basic two step technique: Prayer and speaking the truth in love. They may reject our message or get angry, but we have to be obedient. When someone's life or ministry is being choked by sin, the worst action we can take is to give them a friendly slap on the back and pretend that nothing is wrong.

Amen