

NEW LIFE



By Gordon Arthur

SERMON FOR SUNDAY 23RD MARCH, 2008

Text: “Why search among the dead for one who is alive?” (Luke 24:5b)

Place Written: Burnaby, BC, Canada

Theory: Through death, we can find new life.

Purpose: Spring is a time of both physical and spiritual renewal.

Spring is a time of renewal and new life. Shoots and flowers emerge from bulbs as the frosts and snows of winter recede, and the sun regains its warmth. The seeds sown or fallen in autumn begin to emerge from dormancy and break out of their shells, and new life springs up where it did not exist before. Animals seek mates, and build dens or nests in which to rear their offspring. As we emerge from what has been a hard winter in the Northern Hemisphere, particularly in eastern North America and parts of Europe, and enter the early days of spring, we see renewal of life all around us. However, in addition to this time of physical renewal, the northern spring is also a time of spiritual renewal.

This year, we get at least eight important religious events in the space of four days: the Baha’i New Year, the Buddhist festival of Magha Puja, commemorating the Buddha’s prediction of his death, the Hindu feast of Holi, celebrating the death of the demon of winter, the Jewish festival of Purim, commemorating the deliverance of the Jewish people from the wicked Haman (as told in the Book of Esther), the Muslim commemoration of the birth of Mohammed (Mawlid-al-Nabi), and the Western Christian commemorations of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, followed by the festival of Easter, which falls today.

I will concentrate here on the festival I know best, namely Easter. The Gospel accounts of what happened are familiar to many. On Maundy Thursday, Jesus had a final meal with His disciples, before they went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. There they were met by Judas, one of His disciples, who had turned away from Jesus, and had left the meal early to collect a detachment of guards to arrest Jesus. After his arrest, Jesus faced a hearing that night before the Sanhedrin, and a trial early the next morning, Good Friday, before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator, at the end of which He was condemned to be executed. He was beaten and mocked, before being led to the hill variously known as Golgotha and Calvary, where He was crucified. He died quickly, within a few hours (it could take the crucified days to die), and was hurriedly placed in a borrowed tomb carved out of a rock, just before the Sabbath began at sunset. Since it was not possible to anoint a body for burial on a Sabbath, some women who were followers arrived early on Easter Sunday morning to perform the appropriate rites, only to find the tomb empty and Jesus alive. This came as a total shock to them: they were dispirited and had given up hope, and when the accounts of what had happened began to spread, many did not believe them.

Then there was the encounter with angels – beings that in Biblical thought were not entirely human, and whose appearance usually inspired terror in those who encountered them: “Why are you looking for the living in a tomb?” they asked. “He told you He would rise again; did you not believe Him?” The Gospel writers went out of their way to show that Jesus was both real and physical after the Resurrection: He ate and spoke with the disciples, and they touched Him. While Jesus was clearly the same person after the Resurrection, he was somehow different, as He could pass through walls and locked doors (Luke 24:36-49, John 20:19-29), and some of his friends did not immediately recognise him (Luke 24:13-23). He appeared both to individuals and to groups, small and large.

His appearances caused a dramatic turnaround in the disciples. After the Crucifixion, they thought their great adventure was over; that it had ended in a miserable failure. They went into hiding, afraid that the religious and military authorities, having disposed of their leader, might come after them too. After meeting the Risen Jesus, they began to preach boldly in the streets, heedless of the consequences. They too found new life and new hope in what had happened. They began to share in Jesus, Resurrection. Renewal came to the disciples, who had seemed dead, and through it, they found new life.

That offer is open to us too. As we return to God, we too can find renewal. As the prophet Isaiah tells us, “thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength’.” (Isaiah 30:15, NKJV)

However, returning to God may have a cost attached: God loves us, but He loves us too much to allow us to continue as we are. He wants us to be healthy and to be whole. We all need to let go of unhealthy elements in our lifestyles, things that separate us from God, and generally inhibit our wellbeing or the wellbeing of those around us. We usually know what those weaknesses and unhealthy habits are too. Nevertheless, when we allow God to heal us, He can turn our problems into means of growth, and our weaknesses into strengths. When we allow God to renew us, we can participate in the Risen life of Jesus, the Great Healer who, in the Crucifixion, took upon His shoulders the sins of the world to redeem us and restore us to fellowship with God the Father.

In the Crucifixion, God showed us how much He loves us. In the Resurrection, God showed us that death is not the end, but that it can be a way to new life. Through the Resurrection, God offers us the opportunity of new life, but no one is forced to take it: to claim it, we must respond to what God has already done for us.

Let us, therefore, seek new life from God. No matter what our past, no matter what our present situation, all are welcome; none is turned away (John 6:37). The future is still open: we can work with God in shaping it. Let us not hold to what is past, but move forward in confidence, trusting in God to lead us to something better than what we know now, as He continues to lead us to healing and wholeness.

Amen.

Sermon Word Total: 1,038

Meditation Seed Thought: God loves us, but He loves us too much to allow us to continue as we are.

Feedback/Comments: Please email your comments at:
sermons@newgenius.com

Please also visit www.wnrf.org & www.stuartcoddinstitute.org