

Views from the Pews - Easter Day

After the crucifixion, the Gospels recount many occasions when Jesus was seen alive again by people who had witnessed his death. At that time and since, people who never knew who he really was have tended to dismiss such stories as wishful thinking, or as hallucinations. And yet the radical transformation of the disciples is indisputable evidence that, whatever they had seen, it was no hallucination. They saw and spoke with, and even ate with, the real, living, material Jesus they had always known, for the whole period (conventionally, expressed as 40 days) until the Ascension. It took that long to overcome their astonishment, rearrange everything they had previously believed about the salvation of God, and to be convinced that he was indeed the risen Messiah.

It was not as if the people of the time did not know all too well what happens to a human body after death. When Jesus commanded the mourners to open the tomb of Lazarus, Martha objected, on the grounds that 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days' Jesus replied that 'if you believe, you will see the glory of God', and went on to demonstrate his power to reverse the natural process already under way in Lazarus (John 11:39-40). John reports that many of the Jews did indeed believe in him then. Those who were not there, and now have no way to undo the bodily decay of ourselves and of those whom we love, have always found this challenge to the normal order of things too hard to handle. From that time to this, the stories of the raising of Lazarus, and of the Resurrection itself, are too easily dismissed as irrational fables.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul recounts a long argument with those who could not get past the secular view that there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul explains that the dead are laid down as perishable physical bodies, but raised in imperishable glory. On that day, our nature will be changed in an instant – we mere mortals will put on immortality. Anyone who has been granted some miniscule glimpse of the fathomless love of Christ as it sometimes touches us in small things (any closer, and we would be struck down, as Paul was) have reason to put our secular reservations in another box, and hold on to the mystery of faith.

Kim King