



PARISH OF ST. PETER'S HALLIWELL, BOLTON

TRANSFORMING BOLTON TOGETHER IN JESUS' NAME

The Preacher's Notebook by Rev. Canon Paul Hardingham

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Easter in Three Dimensions

Although Easter Sunday was a few weeks ago now, we are still celebrating the Easter Season in the church. This is the period running up to Ascension Day (May 13th) and marks the 40 days when the risen Christ appeared to his followers. Our danger is to remember the resurrection on a yearly basis, but *'put it back in the drawer'* for the rest of the year. In our gospel presentations we often talk exclusively about the cross and the resurrection becomes an afterthought! However, it is a vital part of the good news: *'Easter is not primarily a comfort, but a challenge. Its message is either the supreme fact in history or else a gigantic hoax.'* (C. S. Lewis). So how do we understand this supreme fact of the resurrection? It has 3 key dimensions for us to grasp:

The first dimension is the proof of the resurrection:

The resurrection of Jesus was an historical event, attested to by both the empty tomb and appearances of Jesus: *'he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also.'* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). The evidence of Jesus' risen presence is also seen in the growth of the church over 2000 years: *'It is a perfectly amazing story of peaceful revolution that has no parallel in the history of the world.'* (Michael Green).

The second dimension is the promise of the resurrection:

George Bernard Shaw famously said, *'Death is the ultimate statistic, one out of one of us dies.'* As Jesus promised, *'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.'* (John 11:25-26). The resurrection of Jesus declares that he didn't die in vain, but has secured eternal life for us by his death on the cross. When we believe in Him, we can look forward to an eternity with God, with a body like Jesus! The resurrection of Jesus guarantees us a secure future.

The third dimension is the power of the resurrection:

The resurrection is also a present experience, *'This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.'* (John 17:3). Eternal life is not just life after death, but a quality of life to be experienced now and for eternity ie *'life in all its fullness.'* Wilson Carlile, the founder of the Church Army was speaking at Hyde Park Corner on *'Jesus Christ is alive today.'* A heckler in the crowd shouted out, *'How do you know?'* Carlile replied, *'Because I was speaking to him for half an hour this morning!'*

'Did the resurrection happen? Yes, but you will be able to accept it only if you let it confront not only your reason and head but also your self-image and the commitments of your heart.' (Hope in Times of Fear: Timothy Keller).