

## Easter Day 2009

### Sermon preached by The Very Revd Robert MacCarthy

Easter is all about Resurrection. So I take some familiar words from the Creed “I believe in the resurrection of the body”. Words which if we think of them at all we probably don’t believe – the proposition put even more bluntly in the *Messiah* which was sung here as recently as last Friday “though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (that is a quotation from the book of Job). What on earth does it all mean? Those of us who have stood on the edge of a family grave know that if we are lucky just a few bones survive – while those who recently went to dig up the remains of Cardinal Newman, as part of the process of canonization, found to their embarrassment that nothing at all had survived except the brass coffin plate.

What I think we should be saying is I believe in the Resurrection of the personality because what is at stake is both the reality of death and the survival of our human identities

Much of what passes for Christianity tries to deny the reality of death. Words which are wrongly attributed to Canon Henry Scott Holland are often said at funerals: “death is nothing at all – it is as if the person is just in another room” etc etc.

Even though whatever remains of the physical body is not raised up Paul tells us that a spiritual body will be. He takes the analogy of how different a grain of wheat is from the eventual plant. This may or may not help you but for Paul the spiritual body is an expression of man’s whole self – which is continuous with his earthly body but different from it. What Paul is affirming is that the new body, though different, preserves the identity and individuality of what went before as fully as wheat is wheat, whether it be seed or plant.

It is only by a realistic acceptance of death that we can hope for life with God. Like Jesus himself we go into the darkness of death with no built-in guarantee except God’s promise. We cling to God as the one who calls those who are not, as though they were. That is the Christian belief.

The old prayer book in its collect for Easter Eve sums it up well: Grant O Lord that as we are baptized into the death of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ so we may be buried with him and that through the grave and gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection; for his merits who died and was buried and rose again for us thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord