

A Divine Deed

A while ago I discussed Resurrection with a student. I found we agreed on its centrality, and on the need to be realistic: we wanted to express our faith that *it happened*. But as soon as I spoke that past tense, I knew I'd made a mistake. The Resurrection isn't something you relegate to the past, like Pontius Pilate washing his hands or even Jesus dying on the Cross. It's too vital for that, and it doesn't belong to the train of events that we read out every Good Friday in the Passion. I might say *it belongs in the eternal*, as if it couldn't engage the messy world where I live now. But I want to say that it doesn't take its place among the other facts that make up the mess. Rather than saying *the Resurrection belongs to this world*, I feel better saying that *this world will belong to the Resurrection*.

My student said, *Only the Resurrection makes sense of Jesus*. At this we began to differ. *The whole life* of Jesus makes sense, and every incident in it: because everything he does is shaped by his single aim: to do what the Father commands. Because Jesus didn't suffer from unholiness, he was able to relate all his experience to the Father. This relationship is like others for us: we struggle at it, and fail. If we didn't have divided selves, we would be capable of holiness, as Jesus was. If Jesus had *totally* failed, so that there were no disciples, and if he were greeted by unrelieved rejection, and there were no people to come to his tomb, then the Resurrection might be totally unknown; it isn't as if the risen Lord made a tour of the Chief Priests, Pontius Pilate, and Judas, with a guest appearance in the Temple. Only those who mourn him, meet him in Eastertide. But we can still say that his journey to the Cross made perfect sense, that he precipitated God's judgment on this world, and that he was right to say as he died: *It is accomplished*. I think that was true of his human work, the work the Father gave him. In dying for love and faithfulness, he showed us God; he showed us ourselves, as we shall be if we love to the end, like him; and he showed us our world, crucified and dishonoured by its marriage-bond with hatred and fear, ignorance and violence. This is, ultimately, what our world does to humanity: the more perfect the humanity, the more certain the punishment. Nothing on earth makes more sense than Jesus' death.

I find it easier to say what the Resurrection isn't, than what it is. It isn't the simple reversal of the Crucifixion; if it had been, Jesus could have "come down from the Cross" and we would have believed in him. Nor is it a consoling prize given to take away past pain, like being taken to Alton Towers after submitting gracefully to the dentist. It isn't anything written up on the tail of any earthly balance-sheet, for an earthly accountant to take it on board and set it against our losses. In his terms, Good Friday is the definitive ruin, and the company is wound up, with a notice on the door: *This place condemned*. Watching the sun setting tonight, blazing in the West, I thought: *all our days come down in flames*. Whatever the Resurrection is, it doesn't enter the lists in any time-bound battle. It is, rather, the ultimate word which sounds like the command of creation: it is a sovereign, divine deed to be registered not in the diary of humanity, but in a new record of the eighth day of creation, a new mode of human existence. The whole earth must pass along the Way of the Cross before it can enter that dawn. As they go, they may see signs, perhaps meet heralds, who will whisper of their destination. But if you are looking for a brochure, or a prospectus, or a wine-list of the future world, don't hold your breath. Until you have drunk his cup, it will be beyond your mind.