

**Holy Week Sermons at Holy Trinity Headington Quarry, 2021**  
*Love, Loss and Life, explored through the writings of C.S. Lewis*

**Easter Day: Life**

Back in February, when the government's roadmap out of lockdown was announced, I told my nine-year-old daughter that we might be living without coronavirus restrictions by the time of the school summer holidays. She literally jumped for joy at this news, and ran around our living room and said: 'Life! I've been waiting for you!' Seeing her reaction made me aware of just how difficult this past year has been for children and young people: how for them, in particular, it feels like life has been put on hold.

Life is the theme of this sermon — following on from the themes of love and loss, and taking inspiration from the writings of C.S. Lewis: an author with a deep understanding of the spiritual imagination of children. I would like to begin with a scene from *Prince Caspian*, the fourth book in the Narnia series, when Lucy meets Aslan again for the first time since the events in the *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. She says: 'Aslan — you're bigger!'. 'That is because you are older, little one', replies Aslan. 'Not because you are', asks Lucy. 'I am not'. 'But every year you grow, you will find me bigger'. With every year of life that passes, Lucy enlarges her perception of who Aslan is — she changes and she grows; and her vision of Aslan — the Christ figure in the story — grows bigger as she does.

Change and growth are part of life — part of natural life, as we know from the pattern of the seasons and the changing colours of our gardens in spring. Part of human life, as we know all too well from this pandemic: life seems to have changed quite fundamentally; and whatever life does look like by the time we get to the school summer holidays, we can be quite certain that life will change again; it always does.

As we celebrate the great miracle of our faith — the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the one who embodies the utter life and vitality of God — I wonder if we can also think of resurrection as change. After all, we know from eye-witness accounts that Jesus's physical appearance after the resurrection had changed. And we also know that most of his close friends reacted to the resurrection initially in the same way that most of us react to change: by running away from it, and feeling scared. 'Terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid'. They needed time to realise that resurrection is positive change — which at first they could not see, but which the risen Christ enables them to see: like Lucy, they too needed to enlarge their vision.

When I use the word 'miracle' to describe the resurrection, I really do mean it. I can't explain the mechanism of this miracle — I wouldn't dare to try. But I do believe it and trust it. It is difficult to uphold an authentic Christianity without it. As C.S. Lewis says in his book on *Miracles*: 'Christianity is precisely the story of a great miracle'. I find it helpful to understand miracles as 'signs', which is the biblical term—signs that reveal the divine presence in the physical order of things; signs that reveal the nature and character of God. The resurrection of Christ is a miracle which points us beyond the physical order of death and decay, revealing the promise of eternal life for all who follow Christ. We already have an intuitive awareness of resurrection as a general principle, through the pattern of death and rebirth we experience in nature. In the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we realise that the principle is there in

nature — even human nature—'because it was first there in God'. Lewis writes, Christ 'lights up nature's pattern of death and rebirth. God has dived down to the bottom of creation, and has come up, bringing the whole redeemed nature on his shoulder'.

I mentioned that the past year has been difficult for children and young people — difficult, too, for those families who been through the journey of pregnancy and childbirth, alongside all the restrictions and uncertainties of this time. Yet for all the challenges, there's nothing like the arrival of a new baby to remind us of the miracle of life. Today, we welcome baby Ezra into the family of the church through baptism, following in the steps of his big sister Iona who was also baptised here just a few years ago. I said that another word for resurrection is 'change', and if anything teaches you about change, it's becoming a parent. I remember sitting in a café with my husband, shortly before our daughter was born. A passer-by noticed my heavily pregnant state and said to us both: 'your lives will never be the same again'.

One book I would recommend to all new parents or godparents is called: Dear Pope Francis — the Pope answers questions from children across the world. Joaquin, aged seven, from Peru, asks this: Dear Pope Francis, Why are there not as many miracles anymore? Pope Francis replies: Dear Joaquin. *Who told you this? It's not true! There are miracles even now. Every day there are miracles, and there are plenty of them. For example, there is the miracle of people who suffer and still do not lose their faith. So many people suffer and continue to remain faithful to Jesus. This is a miracle, a great miracle .... But most of all there are everyday miracles — like the miracle of life ... I have seen many daily miracles in my life. Many.*

Today we celebrate the miracle of life and the birth of baby Ezra. The book of Ezra in the Old Testament arises at a point of rebuilding and restoration in the life of the people of Israel, as they return from their long exile in Babylon. As we celebrate Ezra's baptism today, we are reminded of God's promise of restoration, of renewed hope, of positive change for the future, as we return from the exile of lockdown, and move forwards from this pandemic.

Today, we celebrate the miracle of life — as we believe and trust in the resurrection; in positive change: as St Paul writes: 'we will not all die, but we will all be changed' (1 Cor. 15.51). I will leave the last word to Lewis on this. He writes: *'The miracles that have already happened are the first fruits of that cosmic summer which is presently coming on. Christ has risen and so we shall rise ... To be sure, it feels wintry enough still: but often in the very early spring it feels like that. The spring comes slowly down this way; but the great thing is that the corner has been turned. Our leader Christ is calling us. It remains with us to follow or not, to die in this winter, or to go on into that spring and that summer'.*

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

Revd Dr Laura Biron-Scott  
Vicar, Holy Trinity Headington Quarry