

What does the resurrection mean to me?

John Hudson

21 April 2019

Unlike in the Western churches where Christmas is more important than Easter, in the Eastern churches Easter is more important than Christmas and the abiding memory I have of Easter when I was growing up in India is the sunrise service held on Easter Sunday morning in Darjeeling with Mount Kangchendzönga as the backdrop to the service.

We were all at school in Darjeeling over the Easter period and the school was on the other side of the ridge in the photograph of Darjeeling town and Kangchendzönga facing Mount Kangchendzönga. However, we rarely saw it as clearly as in this photograph as it was normally enveloped in cloud. But you could often see it in the early morning before the mists had risen from the valleys and the clouds enveloped it. On Easter Sunday the rays of the rising sun would first light up the snow on Mount Kangchendzönga and then the snow on the surrounding hills as we celebrated the resurrection making ‘I will lift my eyes to the hills . . . (Ps 121:1) all that more meaningful.

However, my understanding of the resurrection deepened when I got to university where the chaplain was David Jenkins; for him what happened between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, in particular the gift of a new relationship with God through Jesus’ death and resurrection, was central to his faith. I realised that the importance of Easter for me was that, through Jesus’ death and resurrection, I could, and did, have a direct and close relationship with God. I did not need a priest through whom to communicate with God — something on which David and I never saw eye to eye — but could talk with and listen to God without needing an intermediary, as I have done throughout my life.

Later one of my tutors (Bolton, 1973) wrote a book in which he argued that the difference between Christianity and all other religions is that, in all other religions, people are expected to honour God but in Christianity God does us the great honour of giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins, thus allowing us to have a new and direct relationship with Him.

However, many Christians today, including many modern hymn writers, continue to present God as a distant, hard-to-reach God who must be worshipped from afar much like a teenage pop-idol and who will not allow them into His presence without some extravagant beseeching on their part. They seem to have no understanding of the real meaning of the resurrection — expressed when the veil of the temple was torn in two (Mt 27:51) — that there are no longer any barriers between God and us; it is not just that we can enter His presence. We can be in His presence all the time if we accept the reality of what He did at Easter.

Yes, what God has done for us is beyond comprehension and we are right to be overwhelmed by the sacrifice He undertook for us and the love He has shown us miserable sinners. But just as Jesus took the hands of those He healed, God wants to take our hands and walk with us every day of our lives; God does not want us to be tongue-tied, unable to approach Him



Figure 1: Darjeeling town and Kangchendzönga

because of what He has done for us. He wants us to come right up to Him, to thank Him and then to continue our lives in His presence.

To put it another way, the best way to thank God for what He gave us through the resurrection is to demonstrate our joy in and acceptance of the gift by taking advantage of it every day of our lives. If you take a lot of trouble over a gift for someone and then you see them using the gift you gave them in the way you intended, don't you get a rush of pleasant feelings? Well, so does God.

References

Bolton, J. D. P. (1973). *Glory, jest and riddle*. London: Duckworth.