*IF ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God*

Easter Day 2025 Pusey House, The Principal

Exodus 12.21-28, Colossians 3.1-7, John 20.1-10

Today is a day of rejoicing and celebration. Christ is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death All things are filled with light, and the chorus of Alleluia has returned.

The Gospel for today also emphasizes that the Resurrection of Christ also brings confusion and perplexity. We hear this mixture of confusion and hope, joy and perplexity, in the Easter Anthems which invited us into the Risen life this morning. In the same way that we cannot leave the struggle with sin behind at end of Lent, or at any time, we cannot leave the confusion of the first disciples behind either. The risen Christ is in some measure hidden from us, we are invited to become those who seek him. We are invited to go again with Mary and with the first disciples to the place tomb and look for him, to struggle to recognize him even when he appears to us. *For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God., seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God* . Christ is Risen, and what he has done is both manifest, brighter than the Sun, but in a light which shines for faith and love.

Even we were not so full of Easter joy, we might want to ask why St Paul in particular or the Bible in general could not be a bit more clear. What does it mean to seek what is ‘above’, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God? We know that this above is not an ordinary place, but somehow an above which take us beyond or through the ordinary categories of space and time. We cannot travel there in our bodies, so how do we set our minds, not just our affections, on things which are above?

The better part of us will know that this very struggle to understand the Bible is part of our entering into the confusion of the disciples. A Bible that was clear to us now, at this particular point in our pilgrimage, or next year, or a message confined to the thought systems of any age would soon be a dead letter. A proclamation of the Resurrection lowered to what human thought can fully comprehend would not enable us to grow in Christ , to penetrate more deeply into the wisdom and goodness of God in them. We have the Scriptures which God intends us to have, and as we seek the Risen Christ in them, we are seeking those things which are above.

The first verse ‘if ye then be risen with Christ’ invites us to contemplate the meaning of Christ’s resurrection from the dead for us and for one another. When Christ rises from the dead, he destroys the power of death and sin. Alleluia.

The dominion of Pharaoh and his army, the power of the devil and the demons, has been destroyed and drowned in the Red Sea. The gates of hell, and the chains not just below, but deep in our souls, have been broken open. The chains of the sins which we first chose, the chains forged by the sins which we never chose but just endured, the sins of others and our own sins, the sins which became chains and heavy weights for us, these chains have been broken. We may still feel the weight of broken chains, but now this weight is also sweetest iron, the chains are broken in the death of Christ, the devil was tricked and defeated. God hath brought His Israel, that is us, his people, Into joy from sadness.

The day of the resurrection is also the 8th day, the first day of the new creation. Fr Alex helped us to see this morning in the first light of Easter that the resurrection isn’t just a resuscitation. The Resurrection is not a bringing back to life of the same human nature or life that was there before the cross and the grave. When Christ rises from the dead, he gives human nature a capacity to share in divine life. The changes both the character of human life and our capacity to live the divine love—human nature, you and me and all who belong to Christ, become capable of God, have a capacity for divine life.

The ‘ye are dead’, and ‘if you be risen with Christ’, echoes Romans 6

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?...For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In baptism, all the great acts of God which we have rehearsed in these past days are condensed and surpassed – Yes, ‘the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts’ and the Lord’s passover in Egypt, the defeat of Pharoah in the Red Sea Waters, Israel crossing through the sea on dry land, water from the rock, manna from heaven – all these are surpassed in the sacraments of the Church and in the life of faith. Heaven does indeed come to us in the ordinary, ordinary water was for us the sacrament of our new birth, we are risen with Christ. Again, this very day, our Lord is here to breathe and speak his Risen Life into bread and wine which become for us his body and his blood, the bread of a life which cannot die in us, food for our pilgrimage. The font has become for us both the tomb of our Lord and the womb of the Blessed virgin Mary.

We are a new creation, each of us new persons in Christ, and a new body all together, a spiritual building of living stones, alive and knit together by the living water and the holy fire of the Holy Spirit.

This dying and rising with Christ ‘is nothing less than a removal into a new sphere of being. We have been translated from earth to heaven.’[[2]](#footnote-2) Seek those things which are above. St Paul tells us that all our aims, our thoughts and affections, have a new destination – this destination and aim is heaven, where reigns the risen Christ at the right hand of God. ‘To be in heaven is to be fully in Christ’ ‘Heaven is a free and unshakeable embrace’ characterized by divine love.[[3]](#footnote-3) To seek what is above is to seek and already live in that ‘love which is one infinite and changeless act of being that makes all else actual[[4]](#footnote-4), ‘the utter generosity and joy of self-giving’, ‘the single movement of infinite love, delight, and peace.’ To seek this heaven is to know ourselves to be summoned toward and into union with God, who is the source and consummation of every love, the most perfect beauty, the most blessed delight’, [[5]](#footnote-5) the ‘the door to deep knowledge of the created universe’.[[6]](#footnote-6)

We seek what is above not by moving from place to place , but we seek what is above by stepping into and choosing the love and all conquering goodness of God which first chose us. In the words of Dr Pusey: ‘It is the very character of pure, intense, earthly love, as the image and offspring of Divine, that it is, as it were, out of itself.. [the soul] is there where it loves. Or, in words of St Augustine: ‘the soul is more where it loveth, than where it liveth’ ‘Anima magis est ubi amat, quam ubi animat’.[[7]](#footnote-7) We lift up our hearts, we will lift the up our hearts again this morning, not in place, but in love, in yearning for God.

To be risen from the dead, is to be a new creation. It is to know that we have come from God and that we are meant for God, and that we will be in some way restless and out of order until we find our home in God and with one another in God.[[8]](#footnote-8) But even the extraordinary transformation of human nature is only part of the gift of the new creation. The resurrection is the first day of the new creation, for the whole creation: ‘Now are all things filled with light, heaven and earth and under the earth. So all creation celebrates Christ’s resurrection’... ‘Everything that breathes and every creature praises you , O Lord’[[9]](#footnote-9)

The Poet and Oxford scholar Thomas Traherne see the world in the light of the Resurrection for us:

Your enjoyment of the World is never right, till evry morning you awake in heaven: ... and look upon the skies and the earth and the air, as Celestial Joys: ... you never enjoy the World aright, till you so lov the Beauty of enjoying it, that you are Covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it. ... The World is a mirror of infinit Beauty, yet no man sees it. ....It is the Place of angels, and the Gate of heaven.’[[10]](#footnote-10)

Or, in the words of the monk Theopan, “the being and structure of everything created will be for you a book of Theology...”[[11]](#footnote-11)

 “The smell of some perfumed ointment or the scent of flowers’ or, the perfume of incense, reveals ‘…the fragrance of the Holy Spirit,…the all-sweetest…Ointment, which was poured out on all God’s creatures’.

‘The songs of the birds in the trees in springtime raises [our] mind to the sweetest songs of paradise’.

The same principles would invite us to find in the joy of a meal with friends or family a foretaste of the joy of the union and fellowship in love which belongs in its fullest form to the kingdom of God

In a more English register, George Herbert invites us ‘in all things God to see’. Herbert urges us to seek those things which are above in all created things, not just to look at the surface of things, but to let our eye pass through things to see their origin and destination in God. All this is to say something about what it means to seek those things which are above.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In the light of the resurrection, in the light of the new creation in Christ, we don’t just ‘seek’ heaven, we ‘think’ heaven, we think and feel and see how all things have their origin and their destination in God:

‘What are all our sciences, what are all our fragments of knowledge but droplets from that fountain of which we long to drink in all its fulness? “My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God.”’[[13]](#footnote-13)

But our thinking of heaven is incomplete unless we are also willing heaven, loving in the embrace of Christ. We have died and risen with Christ, this is Christ’s work in us. He has fulfilled the law, the real and fundamental law which expresses the creative love and goodness of God in all the particulars of our lives, the ladder on which angels ascend and descend. But what Christ does for us we must also chose and seek by faith, and by walking and living in faith.

On Good Friday, I invited us to consider that we experience the joy of salvation even while we are lamenting our sins Christ.[[14]](#footnote-14) But the order is reversed. Because we say, ‘thanks be to God which giveth is the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ’, we can also say, ‘I crucified thee’, and experience in that lament in the light of and love of Christ the joy of our salvation.

In the same way, we do not leave behind the struggle with sin and temptation at Easter. Indeed, in the light of the Resurrection we see what opposes the life in Christ more clearly. In the power of the Resurrection, we have the power to struggle against sin and temptation more resolutely. In Lent, we looked toward heaven as exiles on the way home. In Easter, we know ourselves to be both pilgrims and those who have arrived. We have been translated from earth to heaven. The promised land is no longer just in front of us, now we are invited to possess the land. We have passed through the Red Sea of baptism, we have left behind slavery to sin in Egypt. We possess the land, and we still need to fight against the sins and temptations which do not belong in the kingdom which God has given us. We are in the land and we fight against the seven nations or the seven deadly sins which are still among us.

Or, to put it in another way, we seek those things which are above by not only thinking heaven, but by loving heaven. To *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth’.* We are to carry the principle of death into the world, and put to death a way of seeing and using things which treats them as cut off from God, merely objects for our use. Pleasure and joy can by part of a journey that lead us toward God, longing for God, and some pleasure and joy can act like road blocks or barriers which stop short or pervert our journey to God.

*fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry*

Which of us, in the light of Resurrection and according to the still small voice of God in our conscience does not recognize in this this list intruders and strangers who we have welcomed in. Which of us does not recognize that we are caught up in ways of thinking or living or seeing the world, and one another, which these confusions and sins describe? We may have chosen these things or welcoming these ways of thinking and living in ignorance, in weakness, in fear , or in cowardice. But in the light of the Resurrection we are invited to recognize the disorder in our loves and to cast them out.

We to seek those things which are above, means both thinking heaven, seeing the origin and destination of all things in heaven, but it also means willing heaven.

Christ does not only change our nature by giving us a share in diving life, he also restores our capacity to love with a divine love. In healing our nature, he also heals the human will, he gives us a capacity to share in his perfect love, in his perfect obedience.

When we turn our back on this love, we experience the same love as wrath. God’s wrath is not something different from his love, and this anger or wrath is not a feeling in God. God is all perfect love, and when we turn our back on this love, we experience it is wrath a kind of chastisement, and we can thank God for that also. God does not give up on us, God’s love seeks us and seeks to burn up and purify what is out of order in our loves. He is not mocked, but he does give us the space to turn away from and to reject his love.

Seek those things where are above. God does not force his love, but he invite us to step into his love, to step into the new creation.

Finally, we may find it hard to think God, we may find it hard to believe that we have been remade, we may find it hard to believe in his favour and goodness toward us. Thinking God goes with willing God. If we have trouble believing, the best response it to seek to will and choose the risen life. All our little acts of faith and love, all our putting to death in whatever way we can what we know to oppose God’s love for us—all of this will strength our eyes to see in the light of the Resurrection.

‘What is our quest for happiness, but a desire for the good; and what is that good we seek – whether knowingly or not – but some participation in the pure and perfect good which is God himself?’ .”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and where we already dwell, in the embrace of divine love and in the Risen life of Christ.

1. Rom 6.3,5 vs 4: Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lightfoot on Col 3.1, p 209, ‘and with this translation his point of view is altered, his standard of judgement is wholly changed. Matter is to him no longer the great enemy, his position toward it is one of absolute neutrality’. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Augustine Through the* Ages, p. 420, on ‘heaven’. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ‘a love which is purely positive, sufficient in itself’ ‘the single ardent movement of this infinite love, delight, and peace.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. All these bits are from Bentley Hart, essay on Impassibility, *No Shadow of Turning.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Evagrius in Bentley Hart [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In Pusey: St. Aug. Conf. iv. 6, 7. p. 51, 2. Oxf. Tr. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The things which we seek are all the gifts and graces which belong to us in Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Risen with Christ: Eastertide in the Orthodox Church*, Hugh Wybrew, pp 18-19, Mattins and Lauds, Easter Monday [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Traherne ‘Centuries’, §27-28 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Unseen Warfare: The Spiritual Combat and Path to Paradise of Lorenzo Scupoli*, edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, revised by Theophan the Recluse. It is written by a Spaniard in the 16th c, translated and edited by a Greek in the 18th c, and revised by a 19th century Russian monk. Theophan, encourages us to see in the things which delight our eyes or our sense of smell to see not only the external things, but to see the good things which come from the “creative divine Spirit” [130] In this way, “the being and structure of everything created will be for you a book of Theology, and while living in this sensory world, you will share in the knowledge belonging to the world beyond the world. [133]” For Theophan, this meant that when we “hear the songs of the birds in the trees in springtime…[ in this birdsong, we may] raises [our] mind to the sweetest songs of paradise and think how the heavens echo for ever with Halleluiah…, and [we may ask God] to let us sing His praises for ever with these heavenly spirit.”

It meant, for him, that the blue skies, like this blue dome, “raises the eyes of the soul to the highest heaven beyond… [to the] heavenly dwelling place prepared for us.” The blue sky is an emblem of God’s mercy. It means, for him, that “the smell of some perfumed ointment or the scent of flowers… [reveals] …the fragrance of the Holy Spirit,…the all-sweetest…Ointment, which was poured out on all God’s creatures, “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys” (Song 2.1). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. G Herbert’s poem Elixir, offers a description of a kind of sacramental or stereoscopic sight which both ‘stays’ the eye on the history or person, the object or image, and on the other hand which passes through it, ‘And then the heav’n espy’.

The Elixir

Teach me, my God and King, /In all things Thee to see,

And what I do in anything /To do it as for Thee.

A man that looks on glass, /On it may stay his eye;

Or if he pleaseth, through it pass, /And then the heav'n espy.

Traherne again: ‘Our apprehension of the love of God and our enjoyment of the World is never right, till evry morning we awake in heaven’, ‘Now are all things filled with light, heaven and earth and under the earth. So all creation celebrates Christ’s resurrection’... ‘Everything that breathes and every creature praises you , o Lord’. Every good and beautiful thing that delights us, is stamped with divine goodness and beauty. ‘You never enjoy the World aright, till you see how [even a grain of] a sand exhibiteth the Wisdom and Power of God’ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Robert Crouse, ‘Heavenly Avarice’. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. From Khaled Anatolios, *Deification Through the Cross* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Robert Crouse, ‘Heavenly Avarice’. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)