

Sermon Easter Family Service 4 April 2010
Subject: Holy Trinity and Resurrection

Dear parishioners,

The good thing about hearing the Bible Story in the children's version is that the images and what has happened then become much more alive. After having heard this story in this version I can vividly imagine how John and Peter ran to have a look into the empty grave and I can see how profoundly terrified Mary Magdalene must have been, when she encountered Jesus whom she believed to be dead. Whereas when we hear the text just read as it stands in the Bible it often feels a bit abstract as if it doesn't have anything to do with us who are living today. When children listen to Bible stories they tend not to question the stories they hear instead they just take everything for real and true. We adults on the contrary *like* to question what is being told to us or written. Therefore the story about Jesus' resurrection can give rise to a lot of questions. How can we understand something that none of us has ever seen or experienced? How can something be true, that we read in an old book and that no scientific experience can ever prove?

Pondering on these questions I realise that I have a completely different approach to biblical texts than children often do. I don't believe, that everything described in the Bible has exactly happened as related. Sometimes of course I regret that I have lost this ability of just believing and that I am often so critical instead. And I feel guilty because even the Bible tells us that we have to become like children in order to believe.

Matthew 18:3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

On the other hand I want to use my intellect and I want to find a way of having faith and still to be capable of using my ability to think. And I assume that many of you feel the same.

For these reasons it is difficult for me to believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Instead I believe in the *spiritual* resurrection of Christ. For those of you who came to the last service you might remember the difference between the word *Jesus* and the word *Christ* that I pointed out in the sermon. *Jesus* is the name of the person Jesus, who was one of us and completely human. *Christ* is

the word to describe Jesus' godly nature, which includes the opinion that he was the long expected Messiah. So when I say I believe in the *spiritual resurrection of Christ* I say deliberately Christ and not Jesus. Because by saying Christ I mean that I first have to believe that the man Jesus was actually the Messiah and when I believe this then I can possibly also believe that God was actually able to resurrect the Messiah.

But in which way did the resurrection happen, if not in flesh and blood?

I said that I believe in the *spiritual* resurrection of Christ instead. The Bible story that we heard gives us a few hints on what could be meant by this. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, and she mistakenly thought that it was the gardener. But as soon as he addressed her with "Mary" she realised that he was actually Jesus. I think it is a very interesting moment of confusion that is being described here. It shows us that the appearance of the resurrected Christ was after all at first not that clear. Other stories about the resurrection tell as well that it took the disciples a moment to realise, whom they were actually dealing with. This also means that the *risen Christ* didn't look the same as he did when they knew him as *Jesus*. Otherwise they would have recognised him right away. I therefore draw the conclusion that Jesus appeared to them in a different way and I can only describe that as a *spiritual apparition*. And that's probably something that is quite difficult to understand if one has never had such an experience. But I believe that there is a dimension to life that we cannot completely seize. Things happen, that are difficult to explain but that are completely real for the person who experiences it. And I am personally convinced that Mary Magdalene and later the disciples truly had a sort of vision of Jesus and that it is precisely this that helped to form their faith and later to form the early church.

For those of you who were not always practicing Christians but who experienced a moment when you decided whether you wanted to believe or not, you might remember that the reason why you decided to believe was not completely rational. On the contrary if you had to explain to a friend or to your family why this change all of a sudden you were maybe struggling to make yourself clear. When I experienced this I didn't quite know how to talk about it or how to explain why all of sudden I was so touched by the story of Jesus Christ. And I think that is absolutely the point about the whole story of the resurrection as well: It is unexplainable unless you have experienced it or unless you

believe in it. And that's where I would like to make the link to the second subject of this sermon, which is the Holy Spirit, to come back to the third and last part of the series of sermons about the Holy Trinity.

For me the resurrection of Christ can only be understood if the dimension of the Holy Spirit is taken into account. This is probably the part of the Holy Trinity that is the most difficult to understand – if it is rationally understandable at all. But basically what the Gospel of John tells us is that Jesus left us his comforter, the Holy Spirit, who should be there for us human beings when Jesus has gone back to his father. So we understand from what we read in the Bible that the Holy Spirit is here for us to open up the way to faith and to comfort us. The best examples to understand this are the disciples themselves. Even though they were utterly sad and disappointed that Jesus had to die a death on the cross, they still had the comfort and the hope that Jesus was somehow still alive and among them. And that was mainly because of the appearance of the resurrected Christ. Some of them were told about it and others had experienced it themselves. And it seems to me that what happened after Jesus' death can only be described as a miracle. The early church was born and it started to spread out very quickly. So for me I can only understand this phenomenon if I believe that the Holy Spirit was acting amongst them. Many people had been touched and they started to believe that there was hope that Jesus was still amongst them and that there was hope for a life after death. And still today many people are touched by this message and they start to believe. And that's for me what Easter means: That the message of Jesus Christ is still alive and that it transforms people's lives and that it gives brings joy and happiness.

Amen