

EASTER, 2009, **Jesus Christ is risen today!**
Newtonbrook United Church - Rev. Allan Baker

Jesus Christ is risen today!



Have you ever thought that it is possible that resurrection happens daily, and that the ministry of Jesus was about a resurrection for this world that God loves – and the people who God loves?

Have you ever thought that resurrection is the beginning of God's new world, and that we are not only beneficiaries, but we are also participants in making it happen?

Stock market pictures

Theologian Harvey Cox once said that this world is operating as if the market is god¹. Bill Phipps, when he visited Newtonbrook last fall, said that we now have proof that the market is NOT God. It has crashed, demonstrating that the creed of:

- an infinitely expanding economy
 - infinitely expanding wealth
 - infinitely increasing consumption, and
 - infinitely increasing consumption of goods, or housing,
- is a false myth. The market is not God!

Picture of stock market graph

Jesus was crucified and there are differing interpretations of the reason for his death. I know that many believe that Jesus died, or was sacrificed, for the sins of humanity. There are other possible interpretations. This morning, I'm here to share what I believe, based on my study of the gospels and theology that is being written in the 21st century.

¹ Harvey Cox, The Market as God, Atlantic Monthly, March, 1999

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I believe that Jesus was murdered by the political and religious elite of his time because his ministry – a ministry of the Kingdom of God here on earth – challenged the status quo. Jesus was a threat to all who promoted increasing affluence at the expense of the poor.

Jesus Christ is risen today and one of the lessons that we learn from Easter is that the message of Jesus was woven throughout his life. Jesus constantly told stories about the Kingdom, or Realm of God where peace and justice exist for all of humanity, and human beings live with respect IN creation.

N.T. Wright, a prominent Biblical scholar these days, has written a book that has powerful, and possibly new, thinking about the resurrection. In "Surprised by Hope" Dr. Wright wrote,

*"the resurrection stories in the gospels aren't about going to heaven when you die. In fact, there is almost nothing about "going to heaven when you die" in the whole New Testament."*²

The point, he writes, that all the gospels actually make in their own ways is that **Jesus is risen, therefore God's new world has already begun.**

Pictures of people begging on the streets

Five pm on Wednesday, April 1st. I was driving home, southbound on Bayview Ave. When I was stopped at the intersection of Bayview and Sheppard a most unusual thing happened.

I was at the pedestrian crossing – first in line you might say. To my left were two lanes of cars that were also stopped. To my right was a TTC bus. Around the front corner of the bus came a young woman. She was wearing clothing that is not typical in North America, but it is not out of place either. She proceeded to walk along the passenger side of the car, and my eyes followed her as she walked towards the passenger windows of the cars and SUVs behind me.

I noticed this woman not only because of her clothing, but also because she unfolded a sign as she went past the right side of my car. It was a brown, corrugated cardboard sign, about 18 inches square.

² N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 2008, page 293

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There were several lines on lettering on the cardboard – all about one inch tall. The first line was all that I had time to read. It said:
HAVE TWO CHILDREN

When I arrived home that evening I read a story in the Business Section of the Toronto Star. It was titled, *"GM's Wagoner Drives off with pension payout of \$23 million U.S."*³

That was just one example of the business news that week.

If Jesus Christ is risen, and the Kingdom of Heaven / the Realm of God is present among us as Jesus taught, how are we to minister to bring justice and equality to God's world?

John Spong once wrote that;

"only when we live the resurrection will we finally know the experience of resurrection."⁴

I first met the Rev. Michael Lapsley when he visited Emmanuel College in February, 1990. I remember that he was a compelling speaker who told us of his journey as a Chaplain to the African National Congress. He described to us what it had been like to be exiled from South Africa by the apartheid regime. At the time Michael Lapsley was living in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Two years later, in 1992, a very changed Father Michael Lapsley came to Emmanuel College. In the course of those two years, he had had a personal resurrection experience.⁵

After his 1990 tour in Canada, Michael had returned home to Harare, and, one evening, had done what all of us do when we return home after being away for a while. He opened his mail. It had explosive results! In his terminology, the Rev. Michael Lapsley was bombed. Letter bombed.

Picture

This is how Father Lapsley looks now. What you cannot see is that he has no hearing in one ear, and his eyesight has been damaged.

³ Toronto Star, Business, April 1, 2009

⁴ John Shelby Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?*, 1994, Page 130

⁵ More info at: www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/michael-lapsley

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What you can see is the picture of a man who has lived through a resurrection.

When he preached to us at Emmanuel College in 1992 he spoke about forgiveness and I asked myself how anyone could ever forgive someone for doing such harm to them. He helped me to remember that, on the cross, Jesus asked God to forgive those who were killing him.

Is forgiveness a part of how we are trying to follow the example of Jesus and change the world into the Kingdom of God?

We sing, Jesus Christ is risen today. I suggest that Lapsley knows the truth of what Spong wrote: *only when we live the resurrection will we finally know the experience of resurrection.*⁶

These days the CBC does more re-runs than it used to. I was listening to one of those in the car one night – a re-run of a five part series where Margaret Atwood was reading from her book "**Payback.**" She ended Chapter Four, where she examines the topic of forgiveness of debts, with a short story. Ms. Atwood asks us to remember the events of September 11, 2001.

Picture

THEN, she asks us to use our imagination. WHAT IF, she says, the President of the United States had gone on TV and said:

"We have suffered a grievous loss – a blow has been struck at us motivated by an obsessive desire to harm us. We realize that this was the work of a small group of fanatics. Other nations might bomb the stuffing out of the civilian population where those fanatics are at present located, but we recognize the futility of such an action. Nor will we accuse any bystander nation of being involved. We realize that acts of vengeance recoil upon the heads of the inventors, and we do not wish to perpetuate a chain reaction of revenge. Therefore, we will forgive⁷."

⁶ John Shelby Spong, Resurrection: Myth or Reality?, 1994, Page 130

⁷ Margaret Atwood, Payback, page 160, 161

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As Margaret Atwood writes, there isn't a snowball's chance in _____ of this ever happening. HOWEVER, she also asks us to imagine a world where this scenario had happened:

- no war in Iraq;
- no Canadians dead in Afghanistan
- no ballooning debts caused by military excesses – in either the United States or Canada

Jesus Christ is risen today. If we want to experience the resurrection, we need to LIVE THE RESURRECTION !

Just imagine that the deep hopes of the prophets and the transformative love of Jesus have the power to draw us into a different world;

- a world that Jesus frequently spoke about;
- a world that is called the Kingdom of God / Realm of God;
- a world where LOVE is the prime commandment
- a world where everyone lives in peace, with justice, and with respect IN creation.

It is what all of us pray for each time we pray that the Kingdom of God will come here on earth - as it is in heaven. **We pray that resurrection will happen in the here and now – and it does! Jesus is risen, therefore God's new world has begun.**⁸

This is Easter – **Jesus Christ is risen today!** It is all a part of the Jesus story that we sing about in Hymn # 352 – **because Jesus is the Lord of the Dance - of resurrection and of new life!**



⁸ N.T. Wright, Surprised by Hope, 2008, page 293