

"DEATH AND RESURRECTION"

TEXT: "Now in the place where he was crucified,
there was a garden...." John 19:41

INTRODUCTION These words are to be found near the end of the 19th Chapter of John's Gospel, and I put them before you here this morning in something of the way of a text for this Easter message. "Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden...."

These words, at least to my way of thinking, suggest infinitely more than they actually say. This is so often the case with lines taken from the Gospel narrative. On the surface, of course; all they say is that near the barren, bleak, and windswept hill on which our Lord was crucified, there was a garden. The Gospel narrative goes on to tell us that in this particular garden there was a tomb which never before had been used. The owner of the tomb graciously offered it as a place to lay the body of Jesus. Since the Sabbath began at sundown, and since according to Jewish Law no one could be buried on the Sabbath, the fact that this tomb in the garden was near the place of crucifixion made it convenient for use, and so it was that the friends of Jesus tenderly placed his broken body in a borrowed tomb.

However, as I said a moment ago, the words of the text suggest infinitely more than these bare facts. Perhaps I am reading too much into them, but I should like to think that God often speaks to us when we read our Bibles with intelligent imagination. "Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden". There are three things suggested by the words that I would put before you.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION GO TOGETHER First of all, isn't it true, in a sense, that death and resurrection go together - for it was in this garden, remember, that Jesus rose from the dead! The very place where the darkness had been the greatest was the place where the rays of a new light began to dawn upon the world. The very place where death seemed to have the word was the very place where new life began to make itself felt. The very place where evil had seemed to score the final victory was the place where love began to be most powerfully at work.

It often happens this way in life. For instance, out of the ashes of an old city, a new city more proud, more beautiful and more modern than the first rises. I remember (and probably you do too) in those days following the Second World War seeing pictures of some of the ruined cities of Europe, cities completely destroyed by the war, by continuous bombing, nothing but rubble and broken blocks of concrete. And I shall never forget, too, seeing some of those cities, firsthand, in the summer of 1954, less than ten years after war, now completely rebuilt - Hamburg, Cologne, West Berlin, Frankfurt - once again proud, beautiful and modern cities. They refer to it as an economic miracle. Out of the ashes of old cities, new cities have risen.

Or think of this in terms of human life. Out of the inner darkness of a deranged and sick mind came, if you can believe it, the sun-drenched canvases of Vincent Van Gogh. Just a day or two before he took his own life one of the doctors in the institution where he had been living and painting magnificently said to him: "Ah Vincent.....if only I had painted one canvas like that. I cure people's pain, but they die in the end. These sunflowers of yours.....they will cure the pain in people's hearts for centuries and centuries."

You might put this down in your memory on this Easter Day, putting it in that place in your life where you keep the things that are most important to be taken out and remembered on the dark and difficult days of the year. Remember that the darkest and most difficult point in a man's life is very often the point where something begins to happen, where new life begins to break through. I've seen it happen in the lives of people and I'm sure you have too. We have seen people rise up out of the ashes, so to speak - the ashes of pain, of sorrow, of grief, of adverse circumstance, of loneliness, of slave to some habit - and so as you listen to this simple line from John's Gospel - "Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden" - let it remind you of this great truth - that close to every Calvary, there is a garden of hope, a garden of new life.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION DO NOT
AUTOMATICALLY GO TOGETHER...

Having said that, we move on to the second point which is this: death and resurrection do not automatically go together.....not naturally, as a matter of course. In the world of nature, they do - but this is not the case on the human level when one deals with human nature and the darknesses that come into people's lives.

Let me see if I can make this clear to you for once again we are on the fringe here of a truth that we need to remember. Two weeks ago my four year old son and one of his close friends, assisted by their respective mothers, put some seeds into the darkness of the soil. The soil was in a small flower pot. Carefully and conscientiously, David has watered the soil and placed it in the window where the rays of the sun have fallen on it. Already the old seeds buried in the darkness of the soil have disintegrated, died, lost their old life and the new life has already come up through the soil. And such excitement as each morning we carefully examine the growth of the new life. IN the world of nature, death and resurrection go together.

However, this sort of thing does not happen automatically on the human level as we think of it in terms of the darknesses that touch people's lives. On the human level darkness and death can be deadly. For instance, put a selfish, self-centered person into the darkness of physical collapse, and the darkness may overwhelm him. Put a pleasure loving person into the darkness of poverty, misfortune, and disease and the darkness may paralyze him. Put a success-loving and money mad person into the wilderness of temptation and the wild beasts may devour him. Put a clever, ambitious doctor who caters to the rich in Schweitzer's hospital in Africa, and the darkness may black out his spirit.

In other words, what I want you to see is this: neither darkness nor death in human experience is any guarantee of resurrection or of new life. Look at it this way. It wasn't the fact that Jesus died that led to his resurrection. It was rather the fact that he lived, and that he lived on such a grand and glorious scale, and that his life was so full of love and compassion and forgiveness, that the one desire of his life was to reach people - to seek and to save the lost, to pity, to understand, to rebuild the lives of people around him - always doing His Father's will. This was the life that was so vital, so real that death could not crush it, so real that death had no dominion over it. He surrendered his own life at the very beginning, and what happened to Him from that point on was of very little concern to Him. His great concern was what happened to people because of him.

And so we come to this solemn conclusion - that it is only the dedicated life - the loving and giving life that rises out of the darkness of human experience. I think we know this - for our own observations of people in life have led us to see that those who rise up out of the ashes are not the people who have led the careless, casual, superficial, selfish, shallow life. It never works out that way - not really, not in the long run. The people who rise up out of the ashes are the people whose lives have first been buried deep in something significant, where the darkness has bruised them, where the suffering has been difficult, where the stern demands of disciplined and unselfish living have been exercised. Only as we die to ourselves, you might say, do we rise to a greater life.

HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION ARE
ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FROM OURS..

There is one other thought suggested by our text, and this one is not quite as obvious as

the two preceding ideas. It's more difficult to put into words, but I shall attempt to do it. His death and resurrection illuminate our deaths, our resurrections. This is taking us close to the heart of the gospel. However the reason for his death and resurrection is quite different than it is for ours.

You know how in this Church we tend to emphasize from time to time the things that we have in common with our Lord, and how we find in him fragments of our humanity - our temptations, our sufferings, our inner resources. We rejoice in every line of the New Testament which assures us that he was like us in so many respects. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that while he is like us in so many ways, he is nevertheless different from us, from even the best we know and have read about in the pages of history. There is a dimension to his life that is not to be found in our lives or in any other human life. The reason for his death and resurrection is quite different than it is for ours.

What makes the difference? We have tried to say it so many times, and yet in a sense, it is the kind of thing that can never be said. You can only see it, and feel the power of it. The thing that makes the difference is that God was in him, reconciling the world, drawing the world back unto himself. In a certain way, God is in all of us, the creator is in every creature, but God was in Jesus doing something that he had never done before, both revealing and releasing to the world the power of his love.

Jesus knew it from the beginning. He knew from the beginning that He was in the Father, and the Father in Him - and that there was between them a kind of intimacy and union such had never existed before and never has since - so that when you saw one, you saw the other. Can you see how and why it is that this particular death and resurrection opens the gates of life such as no other event in the history of mankind has ever done. Something was done in heaven by God that made an everlasting difference upon earth.

CONCLUSION And this is why on this particular Sunday of the year, people come together in the churches around the world not for a memorial service to a dead prophet, but for a festival of thanksgiving for a risen and conquering Christ. Once again our hearts are reminded of the empty cross, the empty tomb, and the truth of all truths - that the spirit of Jesus Christ lives on - present in the world where we live to have dealings with our pain, our sin, our discouragement, and above all to have ultimate dealings with our death. And this is why our hearts are filled with joy on Easter as we try to put into words those things that are really beyond the range of our words, remembering always these few words from John's Gospel - "Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden....." and it was more than just a matter of proximity!

LET US PRAY: O God of life, thou hast filled our hearts with joy and our tongues with singing. Thou didst raise up Jesus from the dead. Confirm us in this the faith of our fathers and in all the everlasting hopes that have risen in human hearts since the first Easter. As at the first Easter, He appeared to the disciples with the benediction of peace and love, so may he appear to us and to our world this day. In his spirit, we pray. Amen

Cathedral of Coventry

has been a destructive century in which
buildings built for the ages were laid waste in
hundreds. Few incidents of the kind in the second

World War sent a greater shock of outrage
throughout the world than the German raid on
Coventry in April, 1941, which destroyed the
1000-year-old cathedral church of St. Michael's,
leaving only its high perpendicular tower stand-

ing. "because man is a creator as well
as a destroyer and because his religions teach him
to build monuments to 'the greater glory of
God' his today a symbol of life, dedication, aspira-
tion. The new cathedral of St. Michael's, which
incorporates the remnants of the old as a memorial
to the past, was consecrated a few days ago.

It is the third to be built at approximately
centennial intervals," wrote Sir Basil Spence, the
architect of the new church. "The first was
built by Henry VIII, the second by Hitler
and now the phoenix has again arisen from the

ashes. Like all the great churches, mosques and
temples of history, it speaks to us in the artistic
style of the time in which it was built. It is
new, it opens out and up; it soars and
ascends and conveys its message (in Christian
terms of death and resurrection) in amazingly
simple terms.

Coventry has long been nonconformist. In
the past they are saying that the newness, the
freshness, the modernity will, as The Times of
London put it, "speak for the Church in the
contemporary idiom of the twentieth century and be
the center of boldly imaginative experiments in
ecclesiastical regeneration and liturgical reform."

The British are an innately religious people.
They do not wear their religion on their sleeves.
It does not come easily to their lips. They feel it.
When Coventry and its cathedral were destroyed
they were grieved, but it was typical of the race that
when the ashes had cooled they made the
decision that St. Michael's should rise again.

Where it stands today, "as true as Coventry
is," in the words of the old proverb, a symbol
of all of us, a message to say that glory, beauty,
and life can be flattened out by the barbarians of
the world as they come along, but that they
always rise again.

A Singer's Seventy-five Years

Roland Hayes has been a clerk in a business office, a field laborer, a mechanic in an iron foundry, a butler and a waiter. If this were all he had ever been, we would not know he was having a seventy-fifth birthday today. He would still be, however, a sensitive, intelligent and public-spirited member of his race.

The honors come to him, as they will at Carnegie Hall today, because he was born with a beautiful voice and had the intelligence, creativity, impulse and courage to work for years to develop his gift. Those who think American democracy slow in maturing ought to recall that Roland Hayes' mother was a slave and that in spite of the beauty of his voice he found it impossible in 1920 to gain a real hearing in this country. What he did, without bitterness, was to complete his training and make his first great reputation abroad. He never turned against his native land, and when it became impossible to ignore him here, he came home. When Southern audiences asked for him, he willingly assented, provided "all my people, black and white, may have the same opportunity to hear me."

The proceeds of his concert today will go under the auspices of the American Missionary Association, to set up scholarships for Negroes in Southern colleges in folk arts and music. This is as he wanted it. But this is an occasion which not only his own people but all of his fellow citizens can take pride in. Indeed, with a man of this character and achievement, you would like to think that all civilized Americans are his own people.