

# Words of Resurrection

Ed Newell & Adrian Snell

*Breathe, Believe...*

DARTON · LONGMAN † TODD

*In 2002 and 2005, Ed Newell and Adrian Snell produced two books and CDs, *Seven Words for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and *Seven Words for Three Hours*. Both published by Darton, Longman & Todd, they reflect in words and music how Christ's 'seven last words from the cross' may speak to us today. The writer and musician have come together once more to offer this reflection for Easter 2020, as we face together the Covid-19 pandemic.*

*This is a free resource, but if used other than for private purposes, would you please acknowledge the contributors. Thank you.*

Ed Newell is an Anglican priest and the author or editor of seven books. His latest, *The Sacramental Sea: A Spiritual Voyage through Christian History*, was published by Darton, Longman and Todd in 2019. He is also a regular contributor to *Pause for Thought* on BBC Radio 2.

[www.ednewell.info](http://www.ednewell.info)

Adrian Snell has released over thirty albums, most recently the *Alpha and Omega* 30th anniversary edition in 2017. As well as a composer, performer and recording artist, Adrian is also a music therapist who works primarily with children and young people with a variety of special needs.

[www.adrian-snell.com](http://www.adrian-snell.com)

# Words of Resurrection

Edmund Newell

Easter Day is usually one of joy and celebration. It's when fasting gives way to feasting, church bells ring out, and Christians gather together to proclaim 'Alleluia, Christ is risen!' This year will be different. For the first time for many people, Christ's resurrection will be celebrated at home – perhaps alone – with church doors locked and bolted, and the mood subdued by a pervasive atmosphere of fear and anxiety. Easter Day 2020 will be like no other. Or will it?

The day Christ rose from the dead is described in all four Gospels. Each evangelist paints a different picture, but what unifies them is a sense of intense, heightened emotion. In Mark, the visitors to the empty tomb, who are told by an angelic figure that Jesus has risen from the dead, flee from the scene in terror and amazement, fearful of speaking to anyone about what they've witnessed. In Matthew, they leave with the mixed emotions of fear and joy. In Luke, they're simply terrified. In John's very different account, Mary Magdalene's reactions range from displays of overwhelming grief to ecstatic excitement. In their different ways, all four Gospels portray the first Easter Day as an emotional roller-coaster, where fear and terror is as evident as joy and happiness.

It's for this reason that Mark's account is so powerful. The earliest manuscripts close with the words 'for they were afraid'. This abrupt, dramatic ending leaves the story unresolved. In doing so, it gives a sense of what it must have been like to be there. The shocked disciples would have realised something significant was happening. But what? Why? How would it affect them? It was a disturbing, unsettling, confusing day. Only the passing of time would enable them to come to terms with what had happened.

Matthew, Luke and John take the story further. Although their accounts differ, a common factor is that each has a resolution – there's no 'cliff-hanger', as in Mark. The

evangelists continue by drawing on the reported encounters between the risen Christ and his disciples. In their distinctive ways, these three Gospels show how the presence of the risen Christ not only enabled his disciples to come to terms with what had happened, but to respond positively to the trauma they'd experienced during the tumultuous events of Holy Week and Easter. Each Gospel ends with the risen Christ offering his disciples a new sense of meaning and purpose for how to live their lives.

In Luke, emphasis is placed on making sense of what had taken place over the past few days. This is conveyed in the story of the risen Christ walking, unrecognised, with two grieving disciples on the road to Emmaus. After they tell the apparent stranger the reason for their sorrow, the risen Christ offers them a way to think things through. '*Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?*', he asks them, before going deeper into his explanation. It's only when he breaks bread with them that they recognise who he is – at which point he vanishes.

John's attention is elsewhere. In troubled and stressful times, our faith can be shaken to the core and we can do things we later regret. John addresses the spiritual and psychological damage of such trauma by portraying the risen Christ as 'the wounded healer'. In John, there's no escaping the reality of suffering – the risen Christ shows his wounds to his astonished disciples and tells Simon Peter that he, too, will suffer a brutal death. What's offered isn't an antidote to suffering, or a vaccine to prevent it, but a way of being reconciled to its reality and dealing with its effects.

John tells of how the risen Christ came to Thomas, who's riddled with doubt. '*Do not doubt but believe*', he says to the disciple, showing him his wounds. Jesus' suffering is real, but so is his resurrection – giving Thomas a reason to have faith. Later, the risen Christ comes to Simon Peter to ask, three times, '*Do you love me?*' The reason for this is clear: it's to forgive Simon Peter for his three-fold denial of knowing Jesus when he was arrested, thus releasing him from the guilt of abandoning his friend. On three

occasions in John's Gospel, the risen Christ greets his disciples by saying 'Peace be with you'. For both Thomas and Simon Peter the presence of the risen Christ brings mental healing, offering them peace of mind.

The ending of Matthew's Gospel is much briefer. It moves rapidly from the instruction by the angel at the tomb for the disciples to go to Galilee, to the risen Christ addressing them on a Galilean mountain. Here, Matthew shows how we can be empowered by the experience of suffering to move on with positivity and vigour:

*'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.'* In different ways, then, Matthew, Luke and John not only bring their Gospels to a resolution, but they offer insights into how we can face and respond purposefully to the storms of life.

A traumatic experience – such as a worrying medical diagnosis, bereavement or the loss of a job – may well paralyse us with fear, just like the visitors to the tomb in Mark's Gospel. The inability to think or do anything at such times is a natural response, and protects us from any potentially harmful knee-jerk reactions. This paralysis only becomes problematic when it persists. What's often helpful – especially if we do get stuck in our fears – is to talk to someone who can listen to our concerns and offer guidance, just as the disciples on the Emmaus road discovered.

Trauma can also destroy self-confidence, and make us lose trust in what's given us strength and resilience in the past – including a religious faith. The risen Christ's words to Thomas, *'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe'* are like a life-line to hold on to at such times.

The things we do and say in the heat of the moment, when stressed, may also need addressing. As the story of Simon Peter reminds us, seeking and offering forgiveness are essential to reconciling the differences, and healing the broken relationships, that can be the collateral damage of a traumatic experience.

Troubled times do end, eventually. Not everyone will see the ending, but for those who do there's an opportunity to be grasped. Understanding first-hand the fragility and preciousness of our God-given life can be transformative, and many people find the experience of suffering life-changing and empowering. We see this in the case of the disciples. Thrown into disarray by Jesus' death, and startled by his resurrection, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles show them responding positively and purposefully to the risen Christ's commission in Galilee. The fearful disciples go on to become courageous apostles, willing to give their lives to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Much of what the Gospels convey about dealing with suffering and trauma is universally applicable: talking things through, moving on by healing relationships, and drawing positively on our experiences. A distinctively Christian element, however, is the enduring presence of the risen Christ. Even when confronted by a global pandemic, it's understandable that each one of us may feel alone and isolated. Suffering has a tendency to make us inward-looking and self-absorbed. At such moments, coming prayerfully before God is more than a psychological prop; it's to place ourselves in a state of awareness that through the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the human condition we experience – including that sense of isolation – is held by our loving Creator. We are not alone.

Easter 2020 will be different. While there's a sadness in not being able to come together in person, the mixed emotions of fear and joy we're likely to experience have the potential to draw us close to the very event the day celebrates. If that happens, then it's a gift and a blessing. In these difficult times, an awareness of the healing, reconciling and empowering presence of the risen Christ and his 'words of resurrection' can free us from anxiety. In doing so, they will help us face whatever the coming days, weeks and months may bring with faith and hope and purpose.

*'And remember,' says the risen Christ, 'I am with you always, to the end of the age.'*

# Breathe, Believe...

Adrian Snell

Fear can paralyse you,  
squeeze the breath inside you,  
trap you in despair.  
Overwhelmed by sorrow,  
burdened by tomorrow,  
isolation's here.

Doubt can lose, accuse and leave you  
drifting at the mercy of the waves.  
No compass, lifeline,  
no sight of distant shoreline,  
nothing of the certainty you crave.

*Stay with me.*  
*Pray with me.*  
*Breathe...*

When ocean mists surround you,  
Storms and gales astound you,  
I will take control.  
I know the raging oceans,  
they'll calm when I have spoken,  
and I will steer you safely home.

Remember, always, I am with you,  
see the Wounded Healer's hands.  
Freedom, hope, forgiveness follow,  
See how resurrection comes.

*Stay with me.*  
*Pray with me.*  
*Believe...*

Peace be upon you,  
peace in times of danger,  
peace within your heart.  
Peace upon your children,  
peace for friend and stranger,  
this peace I now impart.

Remember, always, I am with you,  
see my Wounded Healer's hands.  
Freedom, hope, forgiveness follow,  
see now resurrection comes,  
see now resurrection comes.

*Stay with me.*  
*Pray with me.*  
*Breathe...*

*Stay with me.*  
*Pray with me.*  
*Believe...*

