

Let's talk about bones. I know he's not here, but my dog would like that. Let's talk about bones.

You have hundreds of them. Bishops have 33 fewer, but still hundreds. Those bones are one of the basic building blocks of your body, the hard structures to which the fleshy, wobbly, more interesting bits of you adhere.

Let's talk about bones.

It's all that will be left of you when the worms have done their work, all that will be left to scatter when the crematorium has consigned your fleshly body to the ether.

Let's talk about bones.

Let's talk to bones. It's what Ezekiel was prophesying to this morning, a valley full of dry bones.

Sometimes, I know what he felt like.

Let's talk about bones.

"Can dry bones live?" is the question God asks his prophet.

"Only you know the answer to that" replies Ezekiel. Smart response. God indeed knows the answer. Can dry bones live? Yes they can.

Filled with the Spirit, those dry bones live.

They were dead; now they live.

Those bones are walking the walk even if, at this stage, there's no talking the talk-but actions speak louder than words. What was dead is raised to new life. Enlivened by the breath of God, the bones now speak; they prophesy and what these osseous oracles say, is resurrection.

Let's leave the bony bits and talk, then, about resurrection.

Resurrection. It's absolutely fundamental to the Christian faith. It would be no exaggeration to say, no resurrection, no Christianity, which is more than you can say about the vast majority of things Christians like to shout about.

Resurrection. It's *really* important to Christians.

The whole forty-day period of Lent is getting us ready to celebrate the resurrection. The even longer fifty days of the Easter season is one extended celebration of the resurrection: Liturgical Christians sure know how to party. And it's not contained there. *Every* Sunday throughout the year is dedicated in church as a celebration of the resurrection. *Every* Sunday! Even in Lent, which is why any fast you are keeping doesn't have to be kept, in deed *shouldn't* be kept (unless there's a good practical reason) on the Sundays of this season. Fasting on a Sunday is a sin. Bring on the cake!

So. Resurrection. Cut the Christian candy cane in half and *that* word is written all the way through.

Resurrection

And yet, and yet... most of us don't actually believe in the resurrection.

Life after death, yes. But resurrection? Erm...

Now, if a Christian is asked, 'do you believe in the resurrection?', the answer will be overwhelmingly 'yes', apart from a handful of hangovers from 60s ultra-liberal hippyism and an occasional confused soul who thought it was supposed to be reincarnation. I've met them. Resurrection? (Mentally checks notes). I believe in that. Yes.

But then ask, “so what happens when we die?”

If we were honest, rather than trying to feverishly remember what the catechism says, most of us would say something like

“When we die our souls go to heaven.”

That’s what most of us sort of instinctively believe, but it’s not actually our Christian belief.

I’m often acutely aware of this when taking funeral services, particularly those where the church has come into the life of the departed when they were hatched, matched and now finally dispatched, and the gathered congregation have not thus become used to the language of bodily resurrection. The language of a Church of England funeral talks about being conformed to Christ’s glorious body, sharing in Christ’s resurrection, the great day of the resurrection and so on. To a *’tick the box C of E’* Christians it all sounds *odd*. Just as we are committing the body of a loved one to be cremated or buried, we’re talking about bodies rising again. Even the seemingly jejune ‘Rest in Peace’ implies resurrection: resting till resurrected. At some funerals I may as well be talking liturgical Coptic: indeed it would probably sound less bizarre.

If we believe in life after death, what most of us almost instinctively believe is that when we die our souls- our real selves- leave our bodies and off we go to the Elysian fields of the spirit, or something like that. The body is gone, but the soul carries on.

And there is something very close to that in Christian belief- our souls are, indeed, immortal; but here’s the crux: our souls are nothing worth without a body. No body, no soul. There is a soul, there is a body. But the one cannot be without the other. Software, if you like, needs hardware. Hence the emphasis on the resurrection of the body.

We are embodied creatures. Our bodies matter to us; our bodies *are* us. They are how we experience the world; how we experience life, love and laughter; passion, pain and suffering. We have some control over our bodies, and our bodies have control over us. We can will our bones to move us to the exit; and when we stub our toe in the rush to get out our body swamps our entire consciousness and we know nothing right at that moment but our body.

We are, in the technical lingo a psychosomatic unity: body and soul is what makes you and me: body or soul is neither.

So, resurrection of the body.

Not resuscitation.

We're not talking at the great day about some sort of reconstituting of the atoms that currently comprise 'you'. Those precise atoms which constitute you and me now are not unique to us: some, many of them will have been used before by somebody else, and then who gets them when we rise again? Or, how can the body of a saintly martyr who's been consigned to the flames or devoured by wild beasts be reassembled for resurrection? Though nothing is impossible for God, such concerns are missing the point, though the fact that Christians spent *centuries* trying to work out the maths gives vivid testament to just how much we see this body as ourselves. Instead of struggling with the equation, they could have headed straight to St Paul.

*What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.*

Soul and physical body is what makes you and me now: soul and spiritual body is what makes the resurrected you and me.

What the resurrection body is like, we can know only by observing the one sure example we have, that of Jesus. And we can see that though it is shaped by the experience of the physical body- the marks of the nails are still there- it is so much

*more* than that physical body, incorrupt and glorious, resurrection so much more than a conjuring trick with bones.

So, that's Christian belief. Still, the question remains:

“Can dry bones live?”

Yes they can. Watch this space.