

Reading: Luke 20:27-38

Open the Bible to us in fresh way O God.
In Jesus name we ask it.

The story is told of the great physicist Albert Einstein travelling on a train. The conductor came around to punch his ticket. "I'm sorry," said Einstein "I must have dropped it. Let me get it." At which point he got down on his knees and started searching for it. "Don't worry Dr Einstein, I know who you are. I'm sure you have paid." "I know who I am too," Einstein replied "I just don't know where I am going!"

I'm sure a lot of people don't know where they are going, I mean ultimately going. I am sure many people have no confidence that they have eternal life.

In Jesus' day the Sadducees, like many today, denied any belief in a future life. They even told stories about how foolish this belief was. That's why they were called the Sadducees, because they were sad u cee (sad you see)!

The Sadducees asked Jesus a really dumb question. They dreamed up the worst case scenario of a woman who has been married seven times. Who will she be married too in the resurrection? Surely if anyone deserves eternal rest it is a woman who has been married seven times! They were trying to make Jesus' belief look silly. But Jesus took them seriously. His answer had dignity and intellectual rigour. Jesus taught that resurrected life will be different from our present life. He taught that the dead will be alive in a new way and that God is God of all time and all space.

This teaching would have remained perhaps just a theory if Jesus himself had not come back from the dead. In the story of Lazarus we read a few weeks ago we see this very point made by Luke. When the rich man in Luke 16 is convinced of his eternal fate, he pleads with Abraham, "Please send Lazarus to my Father's home. Let him warn my five brothers." Abraham answered, "Your brothers can read what Moses and the prophets wrote. They should pay attention to that." The rich man said, "No, that's not

enough! If only someone from the dead would go to them, they would listen and turn to God.” Abraham told him, “If they won’t pay attention to Moses and the prophets, they won’t listen even to someone who comes back from the dead.”

Many in our world are quick to reject what they don’t understand and yet we take on faith many things we don’t understand. I was told by my science teacher that electricity is the movement of electrons along the wire. They sort of jiggle each other and they do this in one direction if it’s DC and both directions at the same time if its AC. Do I understand this? No. Does that mean it’s not true? No it doesn’t. I was also reliably told by my longsuffering science teacher that all matter exerts a field of energy called gravity. The bigger the mass, the greater the gravity. Do I understand gravity? No I don’t. In fact no one understands gravity - they just pretend they do. So it is with eternal life. Can I explain to you all the details? No I can’t. Do I believe it to be true? Yes I do.

To explain eternal life the Bible uses metaphors or word images. It describes heaven as being like a city, the heavenly Jerusalem. Or it likens heaven to a garden or a feast or a banquet. Heaven is like these things but not the same as any of them.

Very early on in the development of Christianity, people had to move beyond understanding these things literally. When the Romans found out that Christians believed in the resurrection, they would add insult to injury and when they killed a Christian they would have the body burned and the ashes scattered. They believed this would make it impossible for Christians to be resurrected. Christians looked back at their faith and realised that a passage like today’s points to the next life being wholly different from this life and that Christians don’t need the remains of their earthly body in order to be resurrected. This is why cremation is deemed perfectly acceptable for Christians as a means of burial.

But what does trusting in something you can’t see look and feel like?

Suzy was one of those children who was always climbing and exploring. She lived on a farm so there was no shortage of places to climb and explore. One Christmas, when she was four, her parents gave her the gift of a little kitten. It was one of the strays that had wandered onto the

farm but Suzy loved this kitten with all her heart. One day the little cat went missing. Suzy was beside herself and she looked everywhere. She wandered about the yard calling and calling. From the old shed she heard the little kitten calling. Her father had asked that she not play in the old shed. He said it could be dangerous but this was an emergency. She opened the rickety door. It was hard to open. The cat must have found another way in she thought to herself. She walked inside. She was blinded. The shed was completely dark. She felt her way forward calling for her lost cat. She could hear it meowing above her. She felt her way in the darkness to what felt like an old ladder. She carefully climbed the old ladder reaching out into the loft for her kitten. The cat wouldn't come so she stepped out onto the rafters. They held but at that moment a terrible thing happened. She knocked the ladder with her foot and it fell to the ground broken. A feeling of dread fell over her. She couldn't go back. She was stuck up here. She moved forward and at last her cat came to her. She and the cat snuggled down together for what was going to be a long wait. They both fell asleep. After what seemed like hours she heard her father calling for her. "Suzy, Suzy." She called back, "I'm in here Dad." She could hear her father struggling with the door. "Don't worry I'm coming to rescue you," he called. She could hear him walking towards her. "The ladder is broken," he said, "and these old rafters will never take my weight. You're going to have to jump." "But I can't see you," Suzy said, "how do I know you're there?" "I'm here even though you can't see me Suzy. You will just have to trust. It's not far and I will catch you." She crawled to the end of the loft floor. Her father called to her again, "I'm here. Just step out. It's only a little way. Suzy's father was so close she could hear his breathing but it took her all her courage to lean out and then let go. She fell the few feet holding her kitten. She fell into the big strong arms of her father. He held her close. He was so relieved she was safe that he didn't tell her off too much.

When we face our greatest fear, the fear of dying, God (who is like a loving father) will be calling to us from out of the darkness. We might still be afraid but God is closer to us than our own breath. We have only to take that small leap of faith and God will catch us and hold us in strong loving arms. We can't see what it is going to be like but we can be sure that God is there to catch us.

As it says in Deuteronomy 33:27 "God is our refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms."

May we grow in the trust and the assurance of eternal life.