

Made like him, like him we rise...



Love's redeeming work is done
by Charles Wesley

Easter Address, 2010

In the famous words, Love's redeeming work is done, we hear the opening of a poem which we now know as a hymn by the Revd. Charles Wesley. The author speaks with the utmost confidence of his faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We will sing these words later this morning, to the tune Savannah, a tune which is German in origin, and share the sense of total belief, total elation of the author, writing some 230 years ago.

Well a lot has happened in the world of faith and theology, since Charles Wesley died in 1788.

Theology has changed, society has changed, our religious environment has changed, our perceptions of ourselves as human beings has changed.

Things have happened, like the industrial revolution and the rise of the urban poor; the great world wars of the last century (how easy it is to say that now, after only 10 years on a new one!) which saw the mass murder of people in excess of 6 million; we have seen men on the moon; we have had the terrors of mutually assured destruction, and the nuclear arms race; we have had 24 hour television and instantaneous pictures of disasters; we have the world wide web and all that means for communication, education, and the spread of both good and bad ideas; we have had globalisation of world economies and political power; we have had war in Iraq and faced the threat of Al-Quaida, still do, of course; and we have seen the unwinding of the Christian consensus which until 50 years ago, could be relied upon for sure.

In the world of ideas, Wesley couldn't have anticipated the impact of the ideas of Charles Darwin, or Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. He would have struggled to cope with cloning and growing new babies in order to provide life-saving parts for already living children. He wasn't aware of the possibility of world dominance by the forces of Islam.

For all the wonders of his poetic work, Charles Wesley was a man of his time, and we can only view him as such, and perhaps that is the only fair way in which to view him and any other author?

For Charles Wesley, faith in the resurrection was total, literal and without compromise. These days, not that many theologians could say the same thing! Such a faith may also be metaphorical, of a poetical nature, seen from the perspective of an inner vision. In other words, the physics of the resurrection have troubled theologians for nearly 200 years now, since the rise of physical and natural science and despite an enormous amount of writing and wriggling, the problem remains.

For my part, I feel (with St. Paul) that without the resurrection faith, our whole enterprise as Christians is without a purpose. What happens in the resurrection physically may be a mystery to us, but what happens in terms of ourselves is not.

We are a new creation, and it matters.

We are a new creation, and we must respond to this with conviction, holy living and service to God's people. Our service was seen again this Lent as the congregation raised £700 via our Lent Lunch project for Todos Santos School in Nacala, Mozambique.

In Wesley's poem, I particularly like the phrase

Made like him, like him we rise...

I would like you to leave today with that thought in your mind.

We are made like him- human with the divine spirit breathed into us, so we are also able to rise like him.

Both rise in our response to the difficulties and dangers of life

And rise in the sense of rising to new life, to resurrection, to the sharing of the things to come, the things of heaven, in the here and now of our life. That is indeed what we do each week as we celebrate the Mass and share communion. Here and now we handle the stuff of the heavenly banquet. Because of this, we may as well say, with Charles Wesley:

**Made like him, like him we rise.
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.**

"I have lived, and I die, in the Communion of the Church of England, and I will be buried in the yard of my parish church."

Charles Wesley



Rev. Charles Wesley
1707- 1788