

Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

I wonder if you happened to see 'Repair Workshop' on BBC 1 on Wednesday March 25th? It is a rather sweet programme in which people bring along rusty old things- often of sentimental value - and the team of experts repair them and bring them back into working order- often to the delight of the owner. This week they repaired a rusty 1960s bicycle, a 17th century clock and a dented oxidised brass binnacle for a ship's compass. That last one was the most interesting. Once it had had the dents hammered out and the brass was polished up, it looked magnificent - and the story its owner told was as significant as the beautifully restored antique compass & its container..

Her grandfather had served in the navy in the 2nd World War and his ship was sunk. He spent days and nights in a lifeboat until they were picked up. The compass was a memento from the lifeboat which saved their lives. Now that it was all ship-shape his granddaughter planned to show it off in her living room - and tell the family story that went with it to visitors; the story of terror as the ship was sunk; the hope of the life boat; and then the long days of endurance and waning hope- until finally they were saved.

It's a good story. Your family may have a comparable story of how they came through difficulties and triumphed over potential disaster. You may be living through your family story at the moment. The church family looks back to the story of escape from exile and slavery when the Israelites came out of Egypt. Every year we recall that story on Easter eve as our ancestors in faith, the Jews, do at Passover.

Sceptics have argued that the story of escape from captivity and death into new life is simply an attractive myth which has become incorporated into many religions including Judaism and Christianity.

But what if it's the other way round? That God really is the God of life and freedom and so, over and over again in history, God shows how life and freedom can grow from death and captivity. The Israelites out of Egypt, the Jews out of Babylon, Mary and Joseph escaping the murder of the innocents by escaping to Egypt. And in real life too. People escape from the captivity of addiction into lives of freedom. Jesus' message of eternal life in the kingdom of God was given in terms of release:

‘He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free¹’

God is the God of freedom and of life.

As Jesus said to the Sadducees who doubted the resurrection,
“Have you not read about the burning bush in the Book of Moses, how
God told him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God
of Jacob’? God is not God of the dead, but God of the living.² For to him
all are alive.³’ And faced with the death of his friend, Lazarus, Jesus
wept for his loss - but held fast to his belief in the God of life.

Jesus called to his friend, held captive by death, ‘Come out’ And
Lazarus came out from death to life.

‘Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone
who lives and believes in me will never die.’

Lazarus came out to life which would eventually end in death as our
lives do. But we are promised more than that. The promise for us is
resurrection to life with God. That’s what Jesus promised & what we will
celebrate in 2 weeks’ time. Even from inside our houses we can see the
spring advancing and the earth rejoicing at its rehearsal for the
resurrection when everything will be made new.

Meantime, while we wait, our hope in resurrection is that God is able
see through our ‘rust,’ our procrastination, the things we failed to do, the
mess we made of bits of our life - even if we got other bits sorted out.
And that God will say to us - Come out!’

‘Come out of the prison of shame and guilt and waste into light and life!’
And then, as a master craftsman restores with love and care, we will be
restored - not to how we were before but to what we will be.

Without lies, without deception, without hypocrisy. And in the springtime
of the world made new, God will put his spirit in us and we shall live.

¹ Luke 4:18

² Mark 12:27

³ Luke 20:38