



Resurrection

Resurrection was not a concept that the Sadducees believed in. Perhaps their scepticism seems more familiar to us than Jesus' belief in life after death. In the modern world we too look to the here and now, the material. Science is seen as having the explanations, with the biology of birth, life and death and genetic inheritance to be all that we need to explain life. Certainly the supposedly traditional view of angels on clouds and devils with pitchforks do nothing for us beyond raising a smile and perhaps a groan.

Yet still we struggle with death. How can something as fundamental as a personality be snuffed out? How can the light of life be extinguished for ever? Is life a meaningless round of birth, reproduction, aging and death or, as we seem to have a compulsion to believe, is there something more? Is not the grief we feel when someone dies partly a rebellion against the idea that the loved one is no more?

I want to suggest a different way of looking at things - more of a challenge to think in a different way than a set of answers. I want to suggest that we can look for clues in the material and scientific world that we see around us.

This might seem strange but bear with me for a moment. We assume that matter is substantial and that the mind, the soul, ideas, poetry, art, faith - all of these things are insubstantial. Yet when I look at nature the picture to me is blurred. Matter is made of atoms, which are nearly all empty space. The fundamental forces in our universe are mysterious and counter-intuitive - like gravity or quantum physics. And when we look at nature, we find some surprising examples of resurrection.

'Dust to dust', 'We are but dust' - so it says in the Bible and prayer book - but these are ideas that have a curious resonance in today's scientific world. Science tells us that we are indeed made of dust - the dust that was left by the death of stars millions of years ago. A cycle of creation and destruction, of life and death - dead stars

resurrected as new solar systems, the birth of the ingredients of life such as water and oxygen from the massive explosions that happen when stars burn out.

You and I, made of star dust. Wonderful. But resurrection doesn't stop there. The cycle of life and death and then life again permeates our world. After summer comes winter, then spring comes round again. A seeds disappears and a plant grows. A dead pet buried in the garden becomes food for the next generation of plants.

However, one of the most extraordinary examples of resurrection in nature has to be the lifecycle of the butterfly. Scientists have discovered that inside a chrysalis the body of the caterpillar is completely destroyed. It is not the case that body parts are re-arranged with a few new bits added on with others becoming redundant. Virtually every cell that made up the caterpillar is torn apart until all that is left is a kind of nutrient soup and a very few germ cells, cells that contain all of the information needed to build a new butterfly.

If we have faith in a creator, perhaps we can see these things as clues. Perhaps as we look at nature it has something to say to us. Maybe death is not the end. Something survives, something apparently small and insubstantial yet fundamental to who we really are as a person made by God. Like the chrysalis our bodies are destroyed, but our fundamental nature lives on in a new form.

It is not surprising that other religions have ideas about life after death - after all the clues in nature are so strong. Yet Jesus has to be the most striking example of resurrection - a person who according to the gospel accounts was well and truly dead and yet who came back to life, not the same, but recognisably Jesus, with his personality and his character.

When I found out about how a chrysalis becomes a butterfly I felt challenged. So often we assume that the progress of science challenges faith and even makes it redundant. However, perhaps instead science gives us clues about the nature of the Creator and His purposes for His creation. Maybe it depends on how we look at things. I have certainly found that I look at things in a new way, one of many steps in the journey of faith. A step that makes me think, what an amazing God it is that we follow.

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