

WEDNESDAY APRIL 7 Romans 6:1-10 – facing in the opposite direction

- 1** What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?
- 2** By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?
- 3** Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
- 4** We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
- 5** If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.
- 6** For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—
- 7** because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.
- 8** Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
- 9** For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.
- 10** The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Let's continue our journey through some of the letters in the New Testament that tell us what flows from the Lord's resurrection on that first Easter day. Consider this, says Paul to the Christians in Rome: in the same way that Jesus died and was then raised to new life, that has to be the same for you as well. And that's the meaning of baptism, though it's not always understood that way. But wait a minute, someone might say: how can I die the way Jesus did and come back again? Death is the end of my earthly life, surely?

Yes, that's a good question, but what Paul is talking about is how you die to an old way of life and rise again to a new way of living. Have you ever been at a service where an adult is baptised not with a few drops of water from a rather nice little font, but in a huge tank filled with water, or at a river bank, or in the sea? What you see there is the candidate dunked completely under the water, probably three times. Each time, they disappear from view; then they suddenly burst upward out of the water. It's a powerful picture of death and resurrection. In the early centuries of the church, adults were baptised at Easter after a long period of careful preparation. I read somewhere that, shortly before they were baptised there was a ceremony of renunciation. They turned to the west – the direction of the setting sun, of the end of the day, and they renounced everything that they knew was wrong about the way they had lived. Then they faced east – the direction of the rising sun, of a new day dawning, to embrace a new way of living.

What resurrection means here is the death of an old way of life, and the birth of a new one. Sometimes it's a dramatic turn of events; I once met a man who was a confidence trickster – that is, until he became a Christian. He left it all behind. Sometimes it's rather less spectacular than that. In the same church where I first met the ex-conman, I also met Rick, Jack and Stephen. I was still a research student at university, and I was visiting an old school friend and his wife. He took me to the Men's Fellowship at the church they belonged to. Those three guys made a huge impression on me; I played darts and bowls with them all evening; we drank coffee together. In some ways they were very ordinary but there was something *different* about them. They weren't 'religious', they didn't preach at me (I had no faith in those days) but I liked what I saw, what they seemed to quietly radiate.

Ah, I can hear Paul say, that's exactly the sort of thing I had in mind!