



Waiting, Watchful, Wakeful Living the Resurrection

There is an old African parable about how best to catch a lion. When looking for a lion never go hunting for it, says the parable. The lion will always elude you. To catch a lion it is necessary to stop still, to light a fire and to wait for the lion to find you.¹ The parable is perhaps a good description of one of the important characteristics of a way of living which is the outcome of our affirmation of the Resurrection. In our very affirmation that Jesus lives, like the African warrior, our task now is to live in a continuous expectancy, in ever increasing sensitivity, to the Divine Lion's approach, watchful for the way in which the Risen Christ comes to greet us. As the German writer, Jürgen Moltmann, writes, "We wait and hasten, we hope and endure, we pray and watch, we are both patient and curious. That makes the Christian life exciting and alive."²

Christian life is both exciting and alive! It is exciting and alive even in the midst of the inevitable difficulties that we experience, even in the midst of all that, at times, threatens to overwhelm us, even in the midst of the darkness through which we journey on occasions.

It is exciting and alive because as Christians who proclaim that Jesus cannot be found in a tomb, we are those who live a life in constant watchfulness and expectation. In the apparent absence of Christ from our midst, we live our life in watchfulness. Our watchfulness leads us, as the same writer, Moltmann suggests, to "expect the presence of God in everything I meet and everything I do. . . What does God have in mind for me? What does God expect of me? What is he saying to me through the things that are happening in my world, and what is my response?"³

Again, according to Moltmann this means that we are those who can no longer "pray with closed eyes, but [now rather], messianically, with eyes wide open for God's future in the world. Christian faith is not blind trust. It is the wakeful expectation of God which draws us in all our senses." He goes on to illustrate that indeed this was how the first Christians prayed "

standing, looking up, with arms outstretched, and eyes wide open, ready to walk or to leap forward. We can see this from the pictures in the catacombs in Rome. Their posture reflects tense expectation, not quiet heart searching. It says . . . We are on the watch, in expectation of the One who is coming . . .⁴

¹ See Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered: An epistle from the Masai*, (London: SCM Press, 1978), 63.

² Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning: The life of hope*, translated by Margaret Kohl, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 88.

³ Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 84-85.

⁴ Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 83 -84.

This, too, then should be the way in which we, ourselves, live because of our acclamation that Jesus lives.

The more watchful we live, the more awake we become. Watchfulness becomes wakefulness. It is not surprising then that St. Paul can declare to us,

We are children of the light and children of the day; we do not belong to the night or to darkness, so we should not go on sleeping, as everyone else does, but stay wide awake!(1 Thess 5: 5-6)

This makes us, therefore, - or at least should make us - the very opposite of living as those who are asleep, as those who are living with inertia and passivity. To live with a watchfulness and hope, as Moltmann writes is to “wake up out of the petrifications and numbness of our feelings. We burst apart the armour of the apathy that holds us in an iron grasp. . . We wake up to the world as it is spread out before God in all its heights and depths.”⁵ For,

the full and unreserved ‘yes’ to life, and the full and unreserved love for the living are the first experiences of God’s Spirit. . . [This] spirituality of life breaks through [the] inward numbness [to life], the armour of our indifference, the barriers of our insensitivity to pain. It again breaks open the ‘well of life’ in us and among us, so that we can weep again and laugh again and love again.⁶

To be roused from our sleep and to live our life awake in this way is to experience the power of resurrection life. For resurrection life is a life becoming awake. “I have never yet met a person who was fully awake,” wrote the American philosopher, Henry Thoreau, “how could I have looked them in the face?”⁷ We never quite live fully awake but the Risen Christ for whom we watch and expect leads us into greater and greater wakefulness in life. Moltmann concludes, “People who know that there is someone who is waiting for them and expecting them never give themselves up. And we are expected.”⁸ It is because we know that we are awaited and expected that we keep awake in our life, resisting the seduction to fall back asleep in life.

Because of our proclamation that Jesus is risen, we live with watchfulness, we become awake. And being those who are awake we are those who keep stretching out into new horizons, “stretching out to what is ahead, [always with] a readiness for a fresh start.”⁹ As people of Resurrection faith, the future is given us as pure gift. The future is given to us a relentless invitation.

Waiting, watchful, awake let us journey into that future, given to us as gift by the Resurrection, with confidence and with joy.

Father David Ranson
Academic Secretary
Senior Lecturer in Spirituality
Catholic Institute of Sydney

⁵ Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 83.

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A universal affirmation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 97.

⁷ Henry Thoreau, *Walden*, (Signet Classics, 1960), 65-66

⁸ Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 85.

⁹ Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 87.