

Sermon Summary
3rd of Easter
8th May 2011

- It would be easy to hide behind a safe, abstract exposition of a passage on resurrection on new life this week.
- Events on Tuesday morning, The death of Osama bin Laden and resultant news coverage force me to attend to the juxtaposition of his death with that of Jesus: there are similarities and differences.
- Both focus on death: of an innocent man who gave his own life for others, as opposed to one who viewed the deaths of others as legitimate vehicles for his aims.
- Tombs are important. Christians know the power of Jesus' tomb in Jerusalem and the numerous tombs of the saints as places of pilgrimage to shape visions and focus. Bin Laden's burial at sea hopefully stops his grave having that power.
- So far, so good. What follows is more controversial.
- Both deaths are caused by expediency. Jesus has upset too many powerful people and pays the price: it is easiest to get rid of him. It is easier too to kill bin Laden. But will this really put an end to violence, or will the hydra grow two new heads? It also marks a difference, as Geoffrey Robinson has pointed out, from actions in bringing Nazi leaders to justice at Nuremburg. Then it was viewed as important that justice was seen to be done, it had to do with the principles on which a bloody war had been fought. This seems to have changed, changed so much that this is the first time I can remember that a state-sanctioned killing of this kind has not been seen as a morally wrong or ambivalent action.
- The emotion of joy also features. At Easter, there is joy in new life and the fulfilment of God's promises for his people: joy for positive reasons. Here we see joy at a death. If we had watched crowds in many other nations rejoice so at the death of a political foe, our reactions would be more harsh or fearful. We might, to use Robertson Davies' phrase, see it as the triumph of the Old Adam, that atavistic seeker after revenge, over the New Adam. There is still much of the Old Adam in each of us, not matter how far we think we have removed ourselves from him.
- But, for me, the starkest warning, comes of all places, in a Terry Pratchett novel where an elderly witch reflects on her role in the hunting down of a child-murderer:

The villagers said justice had been done, and she'd lost patience and told them to go home and pray to whatever gods they believed in that it was never done to them. The smug mask of virtue triumphant could be almost as horrible as the face of wickedness revealed. (*Carpe Jugulum*, 73)

- Events of the past week ask us as Christians to reflect on the ways of the world, and whether or not we too are overly tempted by the resurgence of the Old Adam in our joy at retribution, or expedient solutions which surely make us more like Pilate than the Christ.