





*you have got something far more important than all of that.* He was right. Eva did eventually recover and, although she was never able to resume her performing career, she took up teaching ballet to deprived, inner city children. She learned that there was far more to her than her body and that part would never be destroyed.

There are plenty more stories like these- we have all heard them or perhaps we ourselves have been there. People, when their bodies or the body of someone they love is virtually destroyed- can come to realise that there is far, far more to the human person than that which is physical. And it is this, I think, which drives our belief in life after death- the knowledge that the person we are is not the body that we see.  
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Religion has come in for a lot of flack over the years. We have been accused of feeding people lies and illusions simply to get money out of them or to gain power over them. And yes, religion can be corrupt. It has many times exploited the fears of vulnerable people in the cause of filling its coffers and boosting the egos of its ministers.

But on Easter Sunday at least our conscience can be completely clear. Because we did not invent the belief in life after death. It is written deep on the human heart and develops through human experience in this life.

What we offer is proof that the belief is real, that we are not simply deluding ourselves with wishful thinking; that the writing on our hearts has put there by God and not by human naivety.

Today we point to Jesus Christ who firstly showed by his own example that there was far more to him than a physical body; that no amount of pain and degradation, and fear and sadness could destroy the person he was. We heard this on Maundy Thursday; we heard it again on Good Friday – that a broken body was nothing compared to that unconquerable spirit.

But then, Jesus went even further and came back from death itself. His friends saw him again. They could not believe it. They needed a lot of convincing- especially as it was only women who started the tale and no-one takes any notice of them- but Jesus was there, in person, able to eat with them, walk with them, sit with them. He was changed, because he had been through death, but he was indisputably there. He was alive.

And, as St Paul just said, this makes a huge difference to all of us. Because now we know that there is life beyond death. We can go with the hopes and dreams of our hearts and of the human race from the beginning. We can know that, whatever happens to our bodies, we still count. We are OK. We are precious, immortal and indestructible. We do not have to fear death and nor do we need to fear life.

This is Christianity at its best. You are not hitting people over the head with the Bible; you are not trying to push them into a system of beliefs and doctrines which are alien to their own understanding and experience; you are not exploiting their vulnerability. You are simply offering them a framework, an answer to the deepest longings and beliefs of their hearts. This is what Jesus always said that religion should be- life abundant, life making sense, life indestructible. On Easter Sunday the dream of the human race is seen to come true.

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I said that the only way we learn the real truth about ourselves is the hard way. And the only way for Jesus to prove it to us was the hard way. Only by taking on a physical body and by allowing it to be subjected to torture and destruction could he show us where true strength and power lie. Only by enduring death could he come back from death. Only by sacrificing himself could he release us from fear and liberate us to love and live and know God and be filled with God.

He wanted us to know the truth. He wanted us to let go of our fears. He wanted us to know that we were children of the immortal God. And because he loved us he was prepared to take the hard way.

And so today is our great thank-you to him who loved us and gave us hope; our great celebration of the one who sacrificed himself to give us the truth about the unfinished story which is human life.

I close with a short poem by Cecily Taylor, called "Being Dead Already."

*Being dead already I had no need of the fear  
That had constricted me like a winding shroud*

*I wondered at first why I felt so free  
Then realised I had forgotten it and left it behind in the grave*

*"Couldn't I go back and tell them they won't need their fear either?  
I suggested.  
"That's just what I did," he said.*

Thanks be to God.