The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory

for ever and ever

*LITTLE SEED* (2007) Peter Randall-Page

granite 64 cm high

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| **Additional reading:**   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | John 12. 20 - 33: Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the earth **1**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Sculpture: *LITTLE SEED* (2007) Peter Randall-Page | **2 - 3** | | Article: THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES TODAY: through the eyes of an Ignatian Spirituality - Paul Edwards | **3 - 6** | | |  |

### **John 12. 20 - 36: Jesus Predicts His Death**

**20**Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. **21**They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” **22**Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.



*Photo: Dave Livsey*

**23**Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24**Very truly I tell you, **unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies**, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. **25**Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26**Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

**27**“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. **28**Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” **29**The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

30 Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up[a] from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

**33** He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

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| **Peter Randall-Page’s ‘*Little Seed’*** (granite, 64 cm high) |  |

Much of Randall-Page's work is carved in stone and is often deceptively simple. At the core of his artistic practice is a passion for the natural world and its organic geometry. His sculptures contain an inner tension and energy expressed through an individual use of mathematical structure and pattern.

**"My work is both a celebration of the natural world and an exploration of its expressive potential - a subjective celebration of the underlying energy behind**

**everything that lives and grows...”**

***Peter Randall-Page***



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|  | **Peter Randall-Page’s ‘*Little Seed’*** also formed part of the Crucible exhibition of contemporary sculpture at Gloucester in 2010. ▶  ◀ It is prototype and **smaller** **sister to the massive 4 metre tall ‘Seed’** that was lowered into its own special chamber at the Eden Project in Cornwall in 2007. |  |
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Randall-Page’s 70-ton *Seed*, now on permanent display at the Eden Project, continues his exploration of the ways natural forms can be described by mathematical formulas such as the Fibonacci sequence, which, when graphed, describes a spiral like those seen on sea shells, pine cones, sunflowers, seeds, etc

Seeds are fascinating structures formally. The most important thing about seeds is that they are packed with energy—hermetic and discrete in them­ selves, like an unexploded grenade of organic energy. I have always been fascinated by plant geometry; the underlying principles that determine botanical forms. One of the most interesting and pervasive of these geometric phenomena is spiral phyllotaxis, plants ‘use’ it because of its ability to pack things together in the most efficient way possible; and on the whole nature loves economy. This packing system is most obvious in the arrangements of seeds on the head of a sunflower, but the same numerical principles apply to most pine and fir cones, pineapples, daisies and many other fruit, seeds and seed heads

— Peter Randall-Page

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**THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES TODAY: through the eyes of an Ignatian Spirituality - Paul Edwards**

AT THE AGE of sixteen I tried to tell my father that Easter Sunday was a greater feast than Christmas Day. Never in my later decades of teaching and preaching was I to encounter greater incredulity. I might just as well have told him that I had been promised the reversion of the papacy. Easter, in my father's mind, could never begin to rank with Christmastide, and in this he was typical of the lay Catholics of his generation.

Even when we came to Holy Week itself, it was Good Friday that counted for them. On Good Friday afternoon the Church was packed for Stations of the Gross. On Holy Saturday morning the elaborate Paschal ceremonies, beginning commonly at 7.00 a.m., took place in the presence of the usual handful of devout seven-o'clock Mass-goers, a bit dismayed at the length of time it was all taking, and vaguely recalling that Mass had also been a long affair last Holy Saturday.

The laity's lack of appreciation of Paschal tide only reflected a far less venial failure among the theologically educated. In my thirties I heard a prominent English Jesuit state that whereas the emphasis in the Eastern liturgies might be on the Resurrection, in the Latin liturgy the stress was on the Passion of Our Lord. **The next day an exasperated fellow student sat in my room with a Latin missal on his knee, pointing out to me how every reference to the Passion was immediately followed by a reference to the Resurrection**, this being true even of the collect for Maundy Thursday. The mind of our highly intelligent and well-read senior was so focused on the Passion, so blinkered by his

devotion to it, that he had simply not averted to the constant association with the Resurrection.

Modern Spiritual Directors may well consider it their duty, if they are to prescribe Resurrection texts for their directees’ contemplation, to reinforce first of all their own understanding of the texts by studying the biblical commentaries. Here, if they are not already conversant with the work of modern exegetes, they may be in for a shock.

**“The event of the Resurrection appears in the hands of some exegetes to have become insubstantial to the point of evanescence”**

While the theologians and liturgists have been rediscovering and reinstating the mystery of the Resurrection, the event of the Resurrection itself, and the lesser events surrounding it, appears in the hands of some exegetes to have become insubstantial to the point of evanescence. I have listened to a lecturer explaining that the demoralised disciples, continuing to meet in Galilee whither they had fled, came to realise by degrees that their minds were still being influenced by Jesus, and that this communal recognition constitutes the Resurrection. In which case, it seems to me, my father was quite right to focus his devotion on Christmastide.

Catholic commentators are usually less extreme, but will, as is their professional duty, indicate the very great difficulty, indeed the impossibility, of taking the scripture texts literally. They point out that Jesus's final address differs in the different gospels according to the key themes of the individual author, that the universal mission, so explicit in Matthew and Luke, seems wholly absent from the consciousness of the Church of the first few years, that the Jewish authorities in Matthew remember Jesus's predictions of the Resurrection quite clearly, when his closest followers seem to have forgotten them entirely.

How is one to reconcile the Galilee tradition ('Tell my brethren to go to Galilee'), with the Jerusalem tradition ('Stay in the city'), or harmonise the gift of the Spirit on Resurrection day in John, with the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost in the Acts? Luke's gospel compresses all relevant events into a single day ending with an ascension from Bethany, whereas his Acts describe the risen Lord 'appearing to them during forty days' before the Ascension. The more carefully the commentators compare the Resurrection narratives, the more delicately they dissect the individual stories, the more patent it becomes that we can accept very little of the material at face value.

**…We must write our own scenario, compose the dialogue ourselves…**

When, in his ‘Spiritual Exercises’, Ignatius of Loyola refers us back to the contemplation on the Last Supper, he bids us 'see the persons at the Supper', 'listen to their conversation', 'see what they are doing' and in all three cases to 'draw some fruit'. As we have four accounts of the Last Supper we are not short of material for that contemplation. We can imagine the things being done which the evangelists say were done, the things being said which they tell us were said by Jesus and the Twelve on that occasion – but we must write our own scenario, compose the dialogue ourselves.

Because so much of the setting and detail of the Resurrection appearances in the gospel accounts has been consciously chosen by the evangelists, they do not for that reason become unimportant. Perhaps the contrary.

If the evangelist has chosen the location, exercised a certain selection with regard to the *dramatis personae* and created much of the dialogue, he has made his choices, inspired choices, with a pedagogical purpose. It is important for us to grasp the didactic thrust of each choice. Why does Luke focus exclusively on Jerusalem? Why does Matthew stage the Lord's last appearance on a mountain? Why does Luke insist that he ate, John that he was tangible?

It is only recently that I have come to realise through perusing certain non-harmonizing studies of the Resurrection narratives, how very much my thinking has been dominated by Luke's chronology in the Acts. There he describes the risen Jesus as 'appearing to them during forty days', then being 'lifted up', with the descent of the Spirit occurring ten days later at Pentecost. This framework is now enshrined in our liturgical year, and thereby indelibly impressed on us.

It can be quite a shock to realise that the same Luke has in his gospel described the Ascension as taking place on the same day as the Resurrection. Theophilus presumably digested this howling discrepancy without raising an urbane eyebrow. **To me it demonstrates the extraordinary freedom with which these accounts are framed; freedom, that is, with regard to brute facts of time and place,** these being entirely subordinate to catechetical ends to which the writers are consistently, even ruthlessly, faithful.

John differs from Luke's Acts in seeming to place the gift of the Spirit on Easter Day itself. He differs from Acts and Luke's gospel in having no Ascension scene at all. Matthew does not need one.

His Risen Lord seems to be an already exalted Lord – 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' – who is making a brief reappearance here below.

Luke's Risen Lord, on the other hand, is, as it were, in transit, in an intermediate state between the grave from which he has risen and the heaven to which he has not yet ascended. Yet in the Acts Luke has Peter speaking in Matthean terms, as though the resurrection of Jesus is followed immediately by his exaltation and glorification. In fact, Peter so speaks both on Pentecost Day and at his first appearance before the Council. Indeed, even in his gospel Luke has the risen Jesus saying on the road to Emmaus, 'Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' as though the Resurrection and glorification are to be identified.

This actually seems to be the predominant view of the New Testament; it is common to Matthew, the Pauline Letters, to Peter, while in Johannine theology Jesus is already entering into his glory as he hangs from the cross. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians makes no distinction between Christ's appearance shortly after his death and that to himself many years later.

One clear difference there certainly was between his experience and that of the other witnesses he lists to the Corinthians. The early witnesses were able, though often after notable hesitation, to identify the Risen Lord with the Master with whom they had been familiar during his life. Paul, who seems not to have known Jesus before the crucifixion, was not in a position to make that identification. Neither can we identify the Christ of our imagination with any experience of the Galilean carpenter turned rabbi, as we did not experience him during his earthly life.

**At the same time, the understanding of the Resurrection narratives offered by more modern exegesis seems to me to reduce the gap between the experience of those first privileged witnesses and ourselves.**

For instance, if the gospel witnesses saw a Jesus *not* in an un-ascended intermediate stage as in Luke's 'forty days', but as one who was already exalted and glorified with the Father, but allowing himself to be seen again on earth - then that is one difference the less between their experience and ours.

Again, if we are to take the geographical settings as pedagogical devices rather than as historical facts, and to see the emphasis in Luke and John on the tangible presence – 'handle me and see' and 'come and have breakfast' – as a didactic medium rather than a literal assertion, the gap shrinks even further.

Nor is it a matter merely of reducing the differences. Analysis of the structure of the Resurrection narratives brings out certain positive similarities between the experience of the gospel witnesses and our contemporary experience of encountering Christ in prayer or on retreat.

Three fairly constant elements in the Resurrection narratives are:

(1) the **initiative** wholly that of Christ, and commonly accompanied by an element of the unexpected;

(2) the **recognition** by the witness, frequently with hesitation, that the visitant is to be

identified with the Master they had previously followed;

(3) a **mission** conferred by him.

Then as now, even having deliberately selected Christ as a subject for meditation or entered into prayer, the initiative remains quite obviously with Christ, the encounter being wholly outside our control. Expectations are often disappointed; they may be transformed or transcended, Christ will not be programmed by our preparations, nor confined within our anticipation.

Hence there may well be hesitation on our part to identify readily and wholeheartedly the Lord of the unexpected with the Lord of our past, our sincere following of whom has been mixed with preconceptions and misconceptions which we realise we must now correct.

In most of the Resurrection scenes the astonished women, the flabbergasted disciples are given very little time to digest their experience, but are crisply directed to focus their minds and activities in quite another direction; for example 'Go and tell my brethren', 'Go therefore and make disciples . . . ' and 'As the Father has sent me, even so I send you'.

**The Risen Lord does not manifest himself to those first witnesses to round anything off, to provide any sort of grand finale. He is transiently present to heal the past and to confer responsibility for the future. Easter Sunday has no hint of sabbath repose. It is the first day of the week, a beginning.**

*Abridged and adapted from an article in THE WAY Supplement 58, Spring 1987*