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## *Letters to a Young Episcopalian: Resurrection*

*This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.*

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**Last Week's Letter:** [Judgment](#)

[Back to All Letters](#)

**Next Week's Letter:** [Confession](#)

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Dear Anna,

I too look forward to standing in front of the new fire waiting for the start of the Easter Vigil. It's quiet, just the crackling of burning wood. And, it's beautiful, colors dancing in the flames.

I wonder what the disciples saw the first Easter. Sometimes they describe Jesus eating, drinking, and talking as if nothing had happened. Other times they picture him appearing, disappearing, and passing through locked doors as if everything had changed.

Some people say that Jesus never died or that the disciples made it all up. But, something happened. They spent the rest of their lives telling people about Jesus – and they didn't do it for fame or fortune.

Their stories seem to struggle to explain something disturbing.

The ancient world depended on clear boundaries between the living and the dead. They would have been terrified for the dead to come back to life. If the dead came back, they were looking for revenge!

The Hebrews believed in resurrection. But, they thought of it as something that would happen at the end of time. The final judgment was when the good would be rewarded and the evil punished.

The stories about Jesus are different.

Jesus comes back offering forgiveness and reconciliation, not revenge, and his message is for all who have ears to hear, not just for those who belong to a particular group or have earned it in a particular way.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul says that nothing, not even death, will be able to separate us from the love of God.

Rowan Williams puts it this way, "If we now know that all the weight of the hellish alienation we invite for ourselves is not enough to crush the eternal love of God, our eyes are open to see and grasp how that love remakes us."

And, Jesus comes back to do essentially the same thing he was doing before his death. He gathers his disciples, breaks bread with them, and interprets the scriptures for them. In John's Gospel, Jesus breathes his "spirit" into the disciples, so that they become his body in the world.

It's as if Jesus comes back so that his disciples can go on. He renews their experience of God so that they can continue the work of restoring relationships, with God and between people, in order to give the world a chance for peace.

We say that the purpose of church is to be church.

To be church is to choose to carry on this tradition, to do our imperfect best to make the life of Jesus visibly active in the world, in the hope that real peace will come.

And, for that we go forth in the name of Christ!

Your affectionate uncle,  
Ames

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