

Acts 3:12-19  
Luke 24:36b-48

### Resurrection and ignorance

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#### *Festering*

Many of you will have noticed that the Brittany Higgins-Bruce Lehrmann case returned for another of its many, many regular appearances in the newspapers this week. The case concerns an alleged rape in Parliament House in Canberra and has been accompanied by vigorous commentary from all sides about what happened and what it signifies in a culture of fear, duplicity and suspicion. The whole affair has become the kind of thing for which the word “sordid” is perhaps the most apt description.

Nonetheless, the story still claims the headlines. This is likely because it tells us something about ourselves, touching as it does upon the dynamics of power, desire, trust, guilt, safety, justice. It is a classic tale in which *we ourselves* are played, and we look on wondering whether it will turn out to be a tragedy or a comedy, in the literary sense: will it end low or high? We watch to learn *our own* prospects in similar situations: are *we* living tragedies or comedies?

I raise the matter today not to risk speculating or commenting on the allegation but simply because it is now *five years* since the alleged attack. As well as being luridly captivating, the story lingers as a festering wound. Even if a “resolution” finally comes, that wound will not likely ever be healed. This will probably be so for those directly involved but more broadly, we know that this story is neither unique nor not the last of such stories. We know these kinds of struggles, and that they will not end.

The Higgins-Lehrmann case, of course, is not the only thing in the news or our lives which has this character. This festering dynamic is replicated in most of what ends up in the news, apart from those contrived little comedies we call “human interest” stories. What is the Gaza war but such an open wound, or the Ukraine conflict or, more profoundly, the ongoing impact of colonialism, racism, sexism, or rapacious capitalism? Whether it’s the continuing impact over five years of an alleged rape, or of the 80-odd years of the Palestinian conflict, or of the 400 or so years of Western imperialism, or of 2000 years of Christian antisemitism, it looks suspiciously like the peace we hope for *is not coming*. The stories we are forced to live continue to be agonised ones we hope will turn out to be comedic, but we fear will be tragic. As hopelessly pessimistic as this might seem, none of us turns on the news expecting anything other than more such struggle.

#### *Ignorance*

Let’s hold that thought for a moment as we turn to our reading this morning from Acts, in which we hear part of a sermon by Peter (Acts 3.12-19). The death of Jesus was another sordid tale now slowly slipping from public interest. Peter lays the blame for Jesus’ death unambiguously at the feet of the crowd he addresses, and then comes to my focus text for this morning:

*“I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer”*

The meaning appears straightforward: it is because of “ignorance” that the messiah suffers. The implication seems to be that had his audience *known*, they would not have crucified him. Jesus’ death now looks like an accident, in the same way that we might not notice that we put red knickers into the washing machine with the whites, delivering to us a new, rose-tinted wardrobe: “Oops, if I’d known they were in there, I would have pulled them out!” Oops, if I’d known you were the *messiah*, Jesus, I wouldn’t have crucified you. My bad.

The problem with this is that it suggests the error was one of not having the right *information*. But now, finally, the knowledge is given, and the endless, festering suffering will cease. We *want* to hear this kind of story, of course, because it finally resolves things: the hidden truth is now known, the confusion melts away, the estranged lovers are reconciled, the music swells in the background as the credits begin to roll and all is now right with the world, at least until the house lights come back up.

But the ignorance with which Peter charges the people here cannot be a mere lack of knowledge. One of the features of Jesus’ ministry is that it is often rejected *precisely* at the point that it is most appealing, most persuasive, most informative. In John’s gospel in particular, Jesus’ power and so identity are as close as possible to being irrefutable because of what he has done, yet still his opponents cannot see. Ignorance is here not the absence of knowledge; it is the *inability* to know. And so it is the inability to act differently, to change radically how the story will end, the inability to stop the rot, to close the festering wound. This kind of ignorance is a *condition* and not a matter of information. More concretely, it is the likelihood that, had we known that Jesus was the messiah, we would *still* have crucified him because knowing who he is would not be enough to stop us from doing so. Our capacity to crucify the image of God in Jesus springs not from ignorance but from the fact that we very often crucify the image of God in this Rachel or that Abdul.

While a lot has changed since Peter preached, a lot has not. We live in an age in which we might have expected that we had worked a few things out, that a few wounds would now be well healed. We have managed this, of course, on the relatively simple level of nature, at the level of mere knowledge. Penicillin, bypass surgeries and organ transplants treat wounded bodies very well. But wounded souls are a whole other matter, whether the souls of individuals or the souls of whole societies. While we tell ourselves that we live in an increasingly complex world, this is an evasion. Despite our sense of increased complexity and despite the promises we might have imagined the modern world would bring, we still see our troubled selves in ancient texts like the Scriptures. And while “religion” lingers as a convenient scapegoat in our modern context, this defence masks the painful reality, even where the wounds look to be religiously inflicted. Religion is one feature which distinguishes Israelis and Palestinians, but it is not why they are killing each other; religion is not why men rape, or someone might turn to alcohol; it is not why psychotherapists are flat chat treating fractured spirits. Our problem is profoundly human, not religious.

And neither is any of this about *how much* we do or don’t know. When Peter speaks of ignorance, he speaks of what we *cannot* see without the specific light of the resurrection: You could not know him then, Peter says, but now you can. You could not know *yourselves*, but now you can. Peter’s “in ignorance” is not that we crucified the wrong person; it is that we crucify at all, that we imagine that crucifixions heal our festering wounds, rather than exacerbate them. What are the reports which fill our newsfeeds but crucifixions, or fear of crucifixions? Our ignorance is our condition, is our suffering.

## Light

This would all be utterly hopeless if Peter stopped there, for what can such ignorance do to teach itself? But he continues: *In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his messiah would suffer.* The messiah suffers because our ignorance causes *our* suffering, and he is one of us. The messiah – the image of God – suffers because *we* are the image of God, and we suffer.

But while our suffering only festers, the suffering of God in the messiah changes things. God's suffering changes things because it reveals something we cannot otherwise see. This is why Peter's talk of ignorance and suffering arises in the context of his proclamation of the *resurrection*. The risen Jesus is not *merely* risen, not merely undeaded. The resurrection reveals the crucifiers' knowledge of Jesus as ignorance. To say that Jesus is risen is to say that the *crucified* one is risen, the one who apparently *deserved* crucifixion because such a thing surely could not have happened to God's anointed.

But if *this one* is raised, then the resurrection is a light which reveals what we could not know, what we could not see. The resurrection reveals how very, very dark it has been, how dark it still *is*, and what it would take for us to begin to see.

But Peter's proclamation is that "what it would take" has already been achieved. If *Jesus* is risen, then there appears now a revelation by which hidden things might now be seen, by which unknown things might now be heard, by which untouched things might now be felt, by which broken things might begin to be healed.

This light makes possible a radical re-valuation of what we are, what we do, and what is done to us. If we saw by *this* light, what would that mean for even the possibility of rape, or for the idea that bombs are an efficient instrument of justice, or for our assumption that a person is only what we can imagine her to be, or for the conviction that tomorrow is better secured with money than by trusting each other?

Whatever it would mean, we won't know unless we heed Peter's call: Repent, and turn to the God who embraces the crucified and crucifier alike, so that our wounds might no longer fester but be healed in God.

Repent.

Re-think.

Re-view.

Re-imagine.

Re-form.

Res-urrect.

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