

# The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

## Fr Peter's Homily for Easter Day Sunday April 4<sup>th</sup> 2021

Homily for Easter 2021

In C S Lewis' book 'The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe there is a scene where the children are having tea with a family of beavers. Mr Beaver tells them that Aslan is 'on the move' – indeed, that he is in Narnia again for the first time in living memory. Without really knowing who Aslan is (and we know, of course, that in Lewis' imagery Aslan is the Christ figure) just the mention of his name makes the children feel good, like the first signs of Spring, or hearing good news. They ask Mr Beaver about Aslan, and on hearing that he is a lion Susan asks 'Is he quite safe?'. Mr Beaver's answer is very telling: 'Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good.' He is good, so of course he will do them no harm, but safe? No, he isn't that.

This little exchange shows us the depth of Lewis' understanding, because you could ask exactly the same question about the Risen Christ and have a similar response. Is he quite safe? Well, he was brutally murdered a couple of days ago, definitely dead and buried, but now he has risen again, burst out of the tomb and is wandering the land so probably safe is not the best word. Of course he isn't safe (if by safe we mean 'will he let us carry on doing what we have always done, undisturbed and unchallenged'), but he is good. If you were to ask the apostles if Jesus was safe I imagine that they would have a good laugh. It wasn't safe to walk away from their livelihoods and follow a poor man who was travelling around antagonising powerful people while befriending damaged and powerless people; it was never safe, and as they were each confronted later on by the forces of violence and anger it was surely not safe then either. Missionaries, religious, clergy, good decent lay faithful trying to live lives of virtue – in many ways many of us here have known our lives turned upside down by the Lord. He is not safe, in the sense of doing just what we want him to and leaving us undisturbed; but he is good, in that he wants us to be the best that we can be, he wants us as ready as we can possibly become to live with him in Heaven. No-one saw the Resurrection; we do not know what it looked like at all, but I imagine that as the stone rolled back and a previously dead man stepped from the tomb no-one was going to say 'this all seems safe'. Exciting, yes, beautiful, wonderful, awesome, all these of course.

Easter is a day for joy, and wonder, delight and awe, but it is a day of disturbing power, so we must not be surprised if such a radical disturbance of the natural order proves disturbing to our plans and preconceptions.

All this was still in the future, of course, as the women walk to the tomb. They are keen to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, a last act of love, but they are concerned about who will roll away the stone so that they can go into the tomb. They know that a great stone stands between them and the one they love, a stone which on their own they have no power to move. They need not have worried, of course, the stone is gone. Did it feel to them as if the earth had shuddered, had lurched on its axis? Slowly it must have dawned on them what had happened. Something safe and unchallenging? Certainly not. So they run to find the others, to tell them, to spread the disturbance. Easter morning is the first day of a new creation,

everything is different. If it seems like just another day to us, then we will miss its power, we will miss the intensity of the Lord's will; to shake us out of our complacency and flash in our faces a glimpse of a better life, and a better world.

On this Easter night/morning the risen Saviour wants to invite us to join him on an adventure. It will not be safe (in the sense of predictable and unchallenging) but it will be good. He invites us to sow seeds of his mercy, and love, and power in the world, seeds of the Kingdom of Heaven amongst the ordinary and the everyday. What an adventure it will be. All around us there are people who are rather like the women, early in the morning of Easter Day. They are aware that there is something wonderful and loveable and delightful, something really worth living for, something that is at the same time both challenging and protecting, in the world, but they are not so sure where to find it. Something stands between them and their heart's desire, just as it did with the women on that Easter morning. Who will roll away the stones that stand between them and the one that can satisfy their longing? Surely that must be us. We are to be the stone-rollers, inviting people to join the adventure, throw in their lot with the one who is good but disturbing, and shake the world to its foundations. Celebrating a day as extraordinary as the day a man rose from the dead, nothing less will do.