

Message for Easter Day (12/04/2020)

It is hard for us to imagine, knowing the Easter story as we do, just what breathless excitement the friends of Jesus must have felt on that first Easter Day. As Peter and John look into the tomb, with the stone rolled away and the grave cloths discarded on the ground, they see and they believe. They have heard Jesus talking about rising from the dead but until this moment they just did not understand what he meant. Now they do. They see, and they believe. They thought that they had lost him; they thought that he was gone, gone for ever. They thought that all their dreams had been dashed and that the exciting vision of a newer, better, more human world that he held out had been crushed by the forces of power, cynicism and repression. But they had been wrong. They had witnessed something that had never happened before. This is a new world now, a world where death is not the end. Things are never going to be the same again.

This story has an immense power to change the way that we see the world. But this year we read it in a context that is totally new. Over the course of time Easter has been celebrated in so many different circumstances: secretly, for fear of arrest and execution, gloriously in the presence of Kings and Emperors; fearfully in times of plague and pestilence (and there have been plenty of these before); stoically in time of war; sadly in time of loss and bereavement; hopefully in times of change; joyfully for those who are joining the Church. Every Easter the circumstances are different, but the Feast always has something fresh and new to speak to us. The Collect today asks that we might 'rise up in the light of eternity' and Easter always draws us upwards, into the light.

So, what of our present circumstances? Being confined to our homes really is the least of our problems. What does this Feast have to say to families who cannot visit their loved ones, perhaps loved ones who are isolated, frightened and vulnerable? What does this feast have to say to those people who are lonely? Or the people who are worried about their jobs, their businesses, their livelihoods? Or the people who are mourning the loss of people they love, who they cannot give a proper funeral? Or the doctors and the nurses who are exhausted, and anxious, and weighed down by the knowledge that they simply cannot save the lives of people who ought to live? How does Easter help these people rise up in the light of eternity?

There is, of course, no simple and easy answer to this. Over the country, in fact over the whole world, has been thrown a kind of veil of sadness, a sense that this is just so much not how the world ought to be. That was how the world looked to the disciples on Good Friday, and on Holy Saturday. This was so much not how they had thought things would turn out. But then, in an amazing way Easter changed it all, and the world after the event was full of unexpected hope. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday, in the middle of the pain and the confusion the disciples could not see how this could end well. But it did. So as we celebrate Easter in these very strange times, we are in the same place. Like the disciples, we simply cannot see how this will end

well. But because we have Easter to look back on, we know that it will. We may not be able to see the happy ending, but there will be one. These days will pass, and the human Spirit being what it is, deeply suffused with divine love, there will be an ending that is good. We do not need to fret about just what that ending will be, we just need to trust that it will come. It may be that we never go back to where we were; it may be that the new world will be rather different; but that is ok. Everything around us may change, but not the love of God. That will go right on helping us to rise up in the light of Christ. Lets remember the lovely little prayer, The Bookmark of St Teresa of Avila:

**Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing;
God only is changeless.
Patience gains all things.
Who has God wants nothing.
God alone suffices.**

For all those people overwhelmed by the feeling that things are not as they ought to be we need to be voices of affirmation, we need to help them rise up in the light. No, things are not as they should be, but you have done the best that you can, and you are doing the best that you can. No-one judges you because circumstances have robbed you of the ability to do all that you wanted. You are doing the best you can, and there is great virtue in that. The world is not as it was, and much about the new world is painful and confusing. But this is not the end of the story. We cannot see the end, but we can trust that there will be great things there. Out of the wreckage of Good Friday God brings a beautiful dawn. He has done it countless times before, and he will do it once again. In today's first reading, speaking of the resurrection, Peter says 'we are witnesses to this'. Well, so are we, witnesses to his power to turn wreckage into dawn and confusion into delight.