

Easter Sunday

12th April 2020

Today's Reading: **Matthew 28: 1-10**

- from Revd. David Hildred



Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed, alleluia!]. It's so hard, isn't it, not being able to make that response together. I know you'd make it loud and clear the very first time. I know I wouldn't need to say, "Well that was good as a practice version, let's do it for real this time"!!

We are in the midst of very difficult times. This Easter is unlike any other Easter that I have tried to celebrate, but celebrate we must: our present circumstances do not change the facts of Easter, even though what is important about Easter this year will be different from other years.

Our Bible reading lands us in the midst of that small group of women who were going to the tomb of Jesus. Mark's gospel tells us they were taking spices in order to anoint the body of Jesus - they thought they were going to visit a dead body. Their lives were turned around as that stone was rolled away to reveal an empty tomb. The angel says, "I know whom you are looking for. He is not here; he has risen". What a startling turn of events.

Think of the trauma they had been through in the last few days. Jesus, their hero, had been killed by the Jewish religious leaders colluding with the Roman authorities. Their future plans for the great breakthrough of the Messiah had been smashed. Their hopes for the kingdom life that Jesus had taught about lay in tatters.

But that's because their picture of how Jesus is a hero needed to be re-drawn; they needed to have a different understanding of how he would break through the captivity they were in; their kingdom hopes needed to be re-shaped.

So, let's listen carefully to what that angel said, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."

In the middle of all their confusion and disappointment, depression or any other feeling we might guess, the angel says, "Do not be afraid". Something has happened which means that fear is not the final emotion we are left with. The resurrection of Jesus changes things. It's the same today, with our present circumstances.

The angel goes on, "He has risen, just as he said". Those are four very important words - "just as he said". Jesus had already told them what to expect, but their own plans, ideas, anxieties, wishful thinking, and so on, had drowned out his words. Back in Mt 16:21 it says, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life".

The resurrection shouldn't have been a surprise to them, but it clearly was. They had forgotten, or perhaps never heard properly, what Jesus had told them. Have we forgotten, or perhaps never heard properly what Jesus tells us about the impact of Easter?

Life has been shown up to be precarious by the coronavirus: see how easily the whole world is disrupted by such a small entity. This life is temporary and short-lived. The Bible encourages us to view this life as if we were living in tents on a journey to a more permanent home. But we so easily forget that and think this is home.

The message of Easter is that Jesus has broken through all that makes this life temporary and short-lived, and has opened up the way to our eternal home with our heavenly Father. It is "just as he said", he is the Way, the Truth and the Life, no-one can come to the Father except through him (John 14:6). It is "just as he said", everyone who believes in him shall not perish but has eternal life (John 3:16). It is "just as he said" - well, there's plenty more we could dig out of the treasure chest of Scripture!

Even in the midst of the virus restrictions, the egg is still the symbol of new life. As we put our faith in Jesus we are invited to lift our eyes above our present circumstances and see what is really permanent, and what is really home.

Even in the midst of the virus restrictions, chocolate eggs are still delightful as they remind us of the sweetness and the luxury of the Easter message that is ours. They are ideal if they are hollow because they remind us of the empty tomb. If they've got something inside them, then OK, eat that first and then let the egg remind you of the empty tomb!

Even in the midst of the virus restrictions we have hope because the resurrection of Jesus remains the basis of our faith. It is "just as Paul said", which I trust is based upon his understanding of the teaching of Jesus, that "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep ... for as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:20-22).

Jesus is the firstfruits, the first of many to be resurrected. We have a choice: we can remain "in Adam", which is the Bible's way of saying we are focused simply on this life and what this planet can offer, or we can choose to be "in Christ", believing in him, following him, receiving eternal life from him - and it's those who are "in Christ" who are made alive.

This Easter hope, this Easter reality, is unchanged by what our present circumstances might be, which is why we need to remember it is "just as he said", and we can indeed celebrate today...

Alleluia! Christ is risen!