

Easter Day: Christ has Risen Love has come Again

Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia! Today is such a joyous day and such a blessed relief. After the long slow build up of Lent to the confronting anguish of the cross, the grief of the death of Jesus and the rush of joy this morning in being able to pronounce that Christ is risen.

And each year that I am a Christian and a priest it seems a more and more outrageous, challenging and desperately needed truth to proclaim. For what is it we are bearing witness to when we proclaim the resurrection of Jesus the Christ?

We are at the most basic level joining the surprised and surprising witness of the women at the tomb. The last thing they expected was to find Jesus alive again. They came to lovingly and respectfully attend to his deceased body properly, having not had time to do so on the eve of the Sabbath due to custom. No one was more surprised to find the tomb empty, angels in attendance, and Jesus alive again than his followers – they were racked with grief precisely because they thought he was dead, and permanently so!!! So when we proclaim the resurrection of Jesus we join with those first followers and incredulously share the news, that against all our expectations and common sense, we are convinced that Jesus who was dead is alive again.

But that is only the beginning of what we proclaim, of what we have come to believe. Because we proclaim that this strange and startling ancient news headline makes a difference, all the difference, to us right here and right now. We believe that the resurrection of Jesus, some 2,000 years ago changed the world for all time, including our time. We are baptised into a living and life changing truth not simply an ancient remembrance of a strange event.

In our tradition within the church we celebrate the three great days of Easter as a seamless continuous service because we believe that it was the passionate life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus that changes everything. Sacrificial dying, whilst noble, would not have changed things beyond his part of the world in his time. Tragically we live in a world where many are martyred for their beliefs, including loving kind innocent people. Those who knew them remember them but do not worship them.

Jesus, fully human and divine, took into his life and flesh all the horrors of suffering, sin and death so that death itself might die. And in his divinity he rose from the dead having left behind all that is perishable and hateful and sinful so that only life in its purest form – love – might live forever. And this makes all the difference. For he has gone before us where we will one day go, through death into eternal life. And this is what we celebrate in baptism when we symbolically drown, or die, with Christ that we might rise with him. But new and eternal life does not begin after physical life is over, it begins now! With our baptism, in our

union with God, with our taking part of the body and blood of Christ, with our hearing of the word of God, with our prayers and quiet reflections. From time to time we do glimpse and experience the eternal.

And we who live this new life in Christ proclaim that this historical event has made an eternal difference in the spiritual mystical realms and that this makes a difference in the ordinary everyday world too. And it is this last claim that I find the most outrageous, challenging and desperately needed truth. It is one thing to proclaim this is a packed church full on happy faces on one day of the year while we sing lots of hallelujahs but it is another whole order of outrageous faith to proclaim it when we go outside and get in our cars and turn on the radio news. Let alone when we get home and try to stay in loving communion with those we actually do love. Those we adore more than any others still can drive us spare and if we find it this hard to act loving with those we love, well ... no wonder there is so much despair and so many wars in the world!

Sometimes in proclaiming that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus makes a difference to the world I feel like one of those foolhardy peace protesters who went out to meet the tanks and armed forces holding up just a little daisy. Are you old enough too to remember that scene from the Philippines, the 80's I think? That time the tanks stopped, but not always. With no more than my feeble claim of love that can and will make all the difference. And sometimes not even the love, just a belief that love – if found – could make the difference. It is such an outrageous and precarious claim to make. And yet love is all we have. Love is the only thing that can defeat violence, greed, fear, disillusion, despair. Love. And that is the power and promise of Easter. Love. Love that has defeated death. Love that has risen to life again.

Love is not magic but it is powerful. Love will endlessly beckon, call and challenge but will not force itself upon us. Love will confront, confound and convert us. Moment by moment, day by day, love will present itself to us. For love is not just a sentiment for special feast days. It is the very real and ordinary pleasure of living in communion with those we love – our family and friends – in places of familiarity and beauty. It is the call to love those we do not yet know – neighbour and stranger – in very practical ways. And even more profoundly it is the challenge to love those we would rather not know – the unlovely and hard to love – in ways that meet their needs and gives their lives meaning and hope. As we sang on Maundy Thursday at the foot washing ceremony “loving puts us on our knees”. Love, the great ideal and claim of religion, only becomes real when we enact it in our lives, allowing ourselves to be loved and loving others. This is the power and promise of Easter.

Even so, come risen Lord Jesus Christ.