

Easter

31 3 13

Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory.

Our text today is from Luke's account of the resurrection, chapter 24 and verse 5:

'Why do you look for the living among the dead ? He is not here but has risen.

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Happy Easter. Holy Week, which began on Palm Sunday, according to Luke's account reaches its happy ending with some of the women going to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices only to discover that the stone has been rolled away and the tomb itself is empty. Their surprise and astonishment is compounded by the appearance of two angelic beings dressed in dazzling white robes whose initial words are our text today: **'Why do you look for the living among the dead ? He is not here but has risen.**

Holy Week is a week of sharp contrasts. It begins with the crowd shouting 'Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' (Matthew 21 v9) By Good Friday, another crowd is shouting 'Crucify him. Crucify him.' (Mark 15 v13, 14) It begins on Palm Sunday with Jesus cleansing the Temple. By the Wednesday, he is predicting the destruction of this magnificent and much admired building. It begins with Jesus using a knotted rope as a scourge to drive out the money changers and sellers of animal sacrifice from the Court of the Gentiles. By Good Friday, Roman soldiers are scourging Jesus' back with whips in preparation for his crucifixion. On the Monday and the Tuesday, Jesus is being asked testing, probing questions by the chief priests, the scribes and the Pharisees as he teaches in the Temple. By Maundy Thursday night in the house of Caiaphas the High Priest, he is on trial before the Sanhedrin for blasphemy and is being asked, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One ?' (Mark 14 v61) On the evening of Maundy Thursday, Jesus washes his disciples' feet with his own hands; later that same night one of the disciples whose hand dipped his bread in the same bowl as Jesus will betray him with a kiss. But best and most striking of all these contrasts is the fact that the man who breathed out his last on the cross, dying uttering these words 'It is finished' (John 19 v30), three days later has risen from the dead and is seen and heard and touched in the flesh by at least Mary Magdalene and some of the eleven disciples.

Holy Week and Easter are a love story. The love of God for Man. The love of the Creator for the created. The love which dares to pay the price of that love.

I believe in a God who loves us. I believe in a universe that he created so that we, made in his image, awake and aware, conscious, moral, autonomous individuals, may come to find him and to enjoy a real relationship with him in communion with him through the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, our friend and our brother.

Yes ! Great stuff ! But is it simply wishful thinking ? Am I fooling myself or is this true ? Well fairy tales do have happy endings and you can't get a happier ending than the story we Christians cherish and tell. As a priest, I sometimes find my optimism challenged by the awful truth that as human beings we can encounter real meaningless pain and suffering, heartache and grief. The death of a seventeen year-old son; the slow, lingering death of a friend over a period of 15 years from Motor Neurone disease. Illness and death are a fact of life and birth. The fact that we can laugh and feel joy means that we can also cry and feel pain. We are all necessarily mortal and we will all one day have to die. But the God we worship, though clearly of another order of being from us, has chosen in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, to take upon himself our nature and form and by being born and living and suffering and dying, he shows that he too is prepared to share our sorrow and pain so that in the words of Mother Julian of Norwich, 'All will be well'.

And that my friends is the message of Easter. The empty tomb with the stone rolled away and the grave-clothes lying there as if Jesus had only just gently slipped out of them having no longer need of them – these are reasons for our optimism.

'All will be well' for now we know that 'death has lost its sting'.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermon 27 : Easter

