

Saturday 30 March 2024
Easter Vigil

Liverpool Parish Church

NT: Romans 6.3-11
Gp: Matthew 28: 1-10

The Joyous affirmation of Christ's victory over death, the Easter Acclamation rings out on this most holy night when through the resurrection the light of Christ comes into our world banishing darkness. Yet this year more than ever in our memory we seem to be living in a world growing darker day by day.

We continue to see the atrocities being carried out in Ukraine, Gaza, Haiti and across the world each new horror filling news channels and we are filled with disbelief that in the 21st century man continues to act in such a barbaric way.

In our own country the news that our government continues to believe that the best way to respond to the desperate plight of refugees who risk lives to reach the UK is to take them 4000 miles to be 'processed' in a country with questionable human rights is received with incredulity and horror but sadly not surprise.

The world seems ever darker and yet into that darkness on that first Easter Day the risen Christ came in the full blazing radiance of the resurrection bringing hope, bringing life and bringing good news. Christ's resurrection breaking the dominion of death bringing hope and good news. For the women returning to the graveyard in the early dawn of that first Easter morning, the dominion of death was overpowering. The feelings of loss, darkness, sadness utter despair all emotions that would have been theirs, that feeling of disbelief that follows the funeral of a close friend.

Just a week earlier Mary had anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them dry with her hair yet now they were here to anoint his broken body. The women arrive at the tomb, and in that moment of darkness and grief into the early dawn silence a great earthquake and an angel who rolls the stone from the tomb and, as Matthew describes the angel 'appearance like lightning and clothing white as snow'. Here in that moment of disbelief, they meet the angel "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said". And they remembered all that Jesus had told them.

God's kingdom coming into being with a great earthquake and the awesome presence of an angel of the Lord breaking into the dawn silence. The women, the first witnesses to the resurrection, went to tell the disciples the amazing news. That all that Jesus had said about his death and resurrection had come true. The women found the empty tomb and were perplexed, until they were reminded of Jesus' words, and as they ran to tell of what the angel had said, Jesus came and met them and they believed. The risen Christ appeared to them in the midst of their confusion in their feelings of sadness and joy, Christ appears and all that he had said about his death and resurrection became clear to them and they believed.

Matthew concludes the gospel just a few verses later in chapter 28 with the great commission, Jesus' final words "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations". The risen Christ calling each of us to action. As Paul writes in the reading from Romans, 'just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life'. A newness of life that enables us to go and tell the good news. The response of the disciples to seeing the resurrected Jesus we read in Acts, Peter who had denied Christ three times transformed into the great witness that he was, his fear and unbelief being transformed into belief and into action.

In a few moments we have the opportunity to claim this belief for ourselves in the words of the creed. *"For us and for our salvation Jesus, came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures"*.

On this glorious Easter day, the truth is revealed in the empty tomb and in the words of the angel "He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said". The Gospel message of hope for all who believe is here in the empty folded grave clothes. The hope that the risen Christ brings into our lives and into our world.

The core of our belief as Christians, and the hope that has sustained Christians through untold persecution and death over the millennia since our Lord's resurrection, is that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead and in his resurrection body, gives life to all. The Christian hope that we can know the risen Christ and that all who die in the faith of Christ will one day be raised into life through him.

Yes, the world appears to be full of darkness but into this darkness the risen, resurrected Christ brings hope and life. War and economic uncertainty may seem to us overwhelming, but, we are not to be overwhelmed by the darkness we are called into the light of Christ to be people of light.

The resurrection and the empty tomb bring us hope and personal transformation, the empty tomb brings us certainty that darkness and death will never have dominion, for Christ has defeated the powers of darkness.

The story of the resurrection, the Easter Story, is not one to be confined to the history books: it is a living experience for each one of us as we learn to truly see Christ for who he is and the impact he can have on our lives. We need to remember all that he has said and then complete the Easter story, grasp the implications of the resurrected Christ for our own life, because the resurrected Christ brings us forgiveness. The resurrected Christ brings us wholeness and healing. The resurrected Christ brings us a new identity and fullness of life. The resurrected Christ gives each of us the power to be light in the darkness of the world.

This Easter let us each claim that hope for ourselves. Let us be amazed by the Easter message and be prepared, just like the women who were the first witnesses to the resurrection and then as the women go and tell the news of the resurrected Christ to those we meet.

The world, this Easter 2024, is a dark place with much to concern as we stare into the future, yet there is light and there is hope if we look to the risen Christ. This Easter prepare to look into the empty tomb and then prepare to go and tell all that they too can meet the risen Jesus. Go out as people of the resurrection, as people who have met the risen Christ and prepare to be witnesses to the resurrection of Christ in your own lives.

“Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said’.

Alleluia Christ is risen.

Fr Bill Addy