

Alleluia! Christ is risen

Refelection by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ... (1 Corinthians 15:4-5)

The opening words of the Easter liturgy often include the great Easter greeting - **Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!** - words that contain, power, joy, hope, and expectation. But I wonder, what is the true reality of that greeting for each of us and how does the resurrection touch our lives, not just on Easter Day today but every day?

Is our Lord's resurrection running deep into our lives? Is it the life-blood influencing all that we are or do? Or is the resurrection more like a chocolate Easter egg given to a child - gone in a matter of seconds, until next year? To know something in your head, to hear the story, is one thing; to know the reality of that story in our hearts is quite another.

Place yourself for a moment in the shoes of Jesus' disciples on the Saturday of Holy Week. It must have been one of the worst days, if not the worst day of their lives. The unthinkable had happened to Jesus - their master, teacher and friend lay dead in the tomb; and with his death, all their hopes and dreams for the future lay shattered. Running round in their minds must have been questions about whether they had wasted the previous three years traveling around with Jesus, listening to his teaching and seeing the miracles he performed. Although Jesus had tried to explain to them what was going to happen it is quite clear from the gospels that they had not, at this stage, understood the reality of Jesus' words. This, for them, must have been a time of great darkness.

Then, early that first Easter Morning, in bursts Mary Magdalene, with a story that makes things even worse. Not only is Jesus dead but now someone has opened the tomb and taken his body. They cannot even pay their respects. Then the two Marys, (according to Matthew's account of the resurrection) had seen an angel who had said "*There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed.*" Amazing !

Jesus is Alive! He is has risen from the dead.

This amazing reality began to sink in and "I have seen the Lord!" or "He is risen" became the centre of what turned them from a band of frightened individuals, scattered by the shocking events of Good Friday, into people prepared to proclaim with boldness the message of Christ. They had seen and understood the power of God at work in a way never seen before and it gave them the strength to turn the world upside down. The empty tomb, not with Jesus' body stolen or hidden, but with him raised to life again was what made them the children of the resurrection. It gave them a new dimension on life, a new dimension on history, and a new dimension on eternity. It proclaimed loud and clear that

the new order, promised for so long, had begun to emerge: the new leaves could be heard rustling in the breeze - new life - a new creation.

I have a poster of the risen Lord. As you look at it, the first thing that strikes you is the figure of the crucified Christ rising - he is the central focus of all that surrounds him: above him are the sun, the moon, the stars, and around him, plants and trees representing all created things. On closer inspection you see mixed among the natural order, symbols of modern humanity - the world humanity has made - tower blocks and pylons. What the poster illustrates graphically is that in the resurrection **all** things are being drawn to Christ. It is in him and through him that **all** things are being renewed. The cross, where there is no hope, which appears on the surface to bring nothing but defeat, is now the center of all hope, revealed by the resurrection - the grave unable to hold Jesus.

This is an image that we should hold onto and be proud to be a part of, not through our own merits but through God's grace - unafraid to say, in a loud and clear voice "He is risen", not only on Easter Day wherever we may be, but every day of our lives. Living out the resurrection means uniting ourselves with Christ - both in his death and in his resurrection; looking expectantly and with hope for God's renewing hand at work in our world, and being prepared to play our part in that, through words, action and prayer.

This Easter is a dark time not only for our country but also for the world as a whole. We live under the cloud of coronavirus, with all its implications in terms of the sadness of lives lost, suffering from the illness, isolation and economic hardship.

What the message of Easter brings into that situation is a message of hope - of God's presence even in darkness. May we, like the disciples, find afresh the power of the resurrection.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.