

Reflection for the 2nd Sunday of Easter by Jacqueline Kemp (Lay Reader)

The second Sunday of Easter is often called Low Sunday. After all the exuberance of the Easter Sunday celebrations; large congregations, joyous hymns, the church decorated generously with spring flowers, we come to a time to reflect on the significance of Easter. But accounts of resurrection appearances continue, with the gospel for today telling us of Christ's appearance to his close friends and followers.

How can we rejoice when excluded from our churches, living in isolation because of the fear of the Covid 19 virus? This pandemic has made so many differences to our lives. Even when the fears of contagion are passed and we are allowed leave our homes, socialise, return to work, the world will have changed radically. There will be huge economic, social and political challenges.

Jesus came to change the world, to bring back the human race to reconciliation with God, recognising ourselves as His beloved children. Jesus did not come 'to make us good' as the children's hymn says but to establish the Kingdom of God. But I guess if we followed God's way, we would love our neighbours and be 'good'. The changes and restrictions of the past few months have resulted in a change in many people's attitudes. Priorities have changed, medical staff are openly admired, families relationships are either strained or strengthened. Neighbours offer help to the vulnerable elderly. An army of able bodied men and women have volunteered to help others. This will be our strength when we recover from the present dangers.

When Jesus was arrested, tried and publicly executed as a criminal, His followers were devastated. This was the end. Then there were the appearances, truly Jesus with the marks of the crucifixion but alive, speaking, sharing a meal. Today's gospel tells us of one of these early appearances to Jesus' followers gathered together, still frightened and puzzled. Thomas was not with them and when he returned was frankly sceptical about their account. How blessed he was when Jesus came again, inviting him to touch the wounds and sending a message across the centuries to all Christians, "*Thomas, you have faith because you have seen me, blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe.*" John 20 v 29

My daily walk often takes me across the park and along a track to a seat that faces westwards to the Scottish Highlands. Although not seen, I know that in the valleys and on the hills, new life has begun after a cold dark winter. There is noise in the lambing sheds, young calves will soon appear in the fields, the fields themselves will gradually turn green as the new crops grow. In our gardens the daffodils greet the Spring and blossom on fruit trees promises a harvest. God's creation sends its own message of hope. This is the same message that Easter brings, hope of life after dark difficult times.

I will end with a poem read by a visiting priest at the end of the Easter service, many years ago. I do not know the author, maybe it was the priest himself.

DEATH OVERCOME

As long as the sun comes over the hills, scatters the darkness, and fills the world with light;
as long as the fields get green again, and primroses and violets return;
as long as the trees fill up again with leaves, there is hope for us and for the world.

So come, let us follow the footsteps of spring, for the snow has melted,
and life is awakening from its sleep and wanders through the valleys and hills.
Come let us ascend the heights and gaze on the waving greenness of the plains
below,
O come, let us rejoice on this Easter Day, for death has folded up his tent and
gone away.