

## Reflection for Easter Day by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

Have you ever tried to imagine what it must have been like for Jesus' disciples on Holy Saturday - yesterday? For them, the unthinkable had happened. Jesus their master, teacher and friend lay dead in the tomb. All the hopes and dreams for the future lay in ruins. Round and round their minds must have gone all sorts of questions: had they wasted the last three years travelling round with Jesus, listening to his teaching and seeing the miracles he performed? Study the Gospels carefully and what you see is that, despite all this teaching, the disciples still did not understand what was going on.

Then very early on Easter morning, we see Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome going to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body; their main concern is being, *"Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"* But when they get there, they find that the stone, which is very large, has already been rolled back. Could this situation get any worse? Now the body was gone!

They enter the tomb, and see a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting there. Although Mark, in his gospel, does not use the term angel, that is clearly what is implied. The women's reaction is hardly surprising – alarm! It very much echoes other biblical encounters with angels. But then come the words of reassurance and the message he brings *"Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him."*

The message of Easter - Alleluia Christ is Risen - was being announced.

The true reality of what has happened was slowly starting to sink in.

John, in his gospel, has Mary Magdalene going and telling the disciples, and we see Peter and probably John rush to the tomb to find out more. As that day unfolds the seemingly impossible increasingly becomes a reality for them.

Jesus is Alive! He is risen from the dead.

If I were one of those disciples my mind would have been in a total spin, not quite sure whether I was coming or going. Struggling with what to believe and grappling with so many questions, not least, what did this all mean? I'm sure I'm not the only one who has been tricked by Magic Birthday Candles. They are manufactured to look as if they are out and then in a few seconds the flame is back, to frustrate, but also to bring enjoyment and laughter. How do such candles relate to Easter?

Those who hated Jesus, the religious leaders in Jerusalem at the time, had done their worst. They had got rid of the so-called troublemaker. With Good Friday it is as if Jesus had been blown out. He was no longer a problem. He was dead.

The Jewish leaders know it, the Roman soldiers who had carried out the execution know it and the disciples know it. Jesus was dead. Like the person blowing out the candles they were certain they had blown him out. The reality though was very different, on the third day Jesus rose from death. Jesus is Alive!

Easter, with the resurrection of our Lord, lay at the very heart of everything those disciples and early church said and did from that day on.

"I have seen the Lord!" or "He is risen" was at the center of what turned them from a band of frightened and confused individuals, scattered by events of Good Friday. Into a group prepared to shout with boldness the message of Christ. What they had seen and now began to understand was the power of God at work in a way never seen before. It gave them a new understanding of life, a new understanding of history, and a new understanding of eternity. It proclaimed loudly that the new order promised had begun to emerge, the new leaves could be heard rustling in the breeze - new life, new creation.

St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthian's, (1 Cor 15:19) underlines this point *"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."*

Our Christian faith is rooted in the resurrection. That means that each of us should be living in the light of resurrection.

In Jerusalem at the Orthodox Easter, which this year is 2<sup>nd</sup> May, there is a service called Holy Fire. The Church of the Resurrection, which is situated at the most likely location for Calvary & Jesus' tomb is usually crowded. As the Easter festivities begin, the Easter fire is lit and from that fire everybody receives a lighted candle, not a light simply to keep alight during that service but to take home and place in the windows of their homes. The light of Christ, the light of Easter.

To live in the light of the resurrection, involves us being united with Christ both in his death and in his resurrection;

looking forward expectantly and with hope for God's renewing touch to be seen in our world. As we continue to struggle with the pandemic that is very true. Yet is also involves us being prepared to play our part in that process, through word, action and prayer.

As one version of the baptism service puts it.

*"In baptism we die to sin and rise to newness of life in Christ. Here we find rebirth in the Spirit and set our minds on his heavenly gifts."*

The cross which appears to be the place where all hope is lost, is now the now the center of all hope, and revealed by the resurrection - the grave unable to hold Jesus. It the image of the ultimate renewal, of the defeat of that which seems so undefeatable.

It's an image that we should each be proud to part of, not through our own merits but through God' grace - unafraid to say, in a loud and clear voice "He is risen". Not only here today, Easter Day, but every day and in every situation. Living out this resurrection image means looking expectantly and with hope for God's renewing to be at work in our world; not being surprised when we see his hand at work; being prepared to play our part in that process, through word, action and prayer, nurturing and encouraging the new shoots that we see.

A prayer that is used regularly at the end of the Eucharist in the Anglican Church of Canada.

*Glory to God, whose power, working in us,  
can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.  
Glory to God from generation to generation,  
in the Church and in Christ Jesus,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

Is that not the message of Easter?

For the disciples – the resurrection was definitely more than we can ask or imagine - it changed everything and can do the same for us.