

Easter Day 2025

Isaiah 65.17-end, Easter Anthems, Acts 10.34-43, John 20.1-18

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

Where does one begin? How about beginning with what is directly before me an assembly of persons, an Easter people gathered. Look around. Take it in. We are what I call a living organism. You are, we are a part of the miracle of Easter. Consider, we will never be gathered together again in the same way. It is special this moment in time. We need to be aware of just how very special and precious it is, when we dwell together in unity. The psalmist says of unity, 'It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard,... and It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion.' (Psalm 133). Today we are richly rewarded by the presence of fellow Christians. Some we know by name, but not many. Best to pinch yourself. We are connected, connected by a shared humanity, all made in the image of God now abiding in Christ. The welcome and the trust we extend without qualification to each other is yet another miracle of Easter.

The living organism, this fellowship divine, of Christians from around the world gathered in one place in a historic building with its own Christian faith story united in giving time and attention to a central tenet of the Christian faith captured in the greeting of this day, "Christ is risen!" and its resounding response, "He is risen indeed!" is also captured in a creed first formulated 1700 years ago at Nicaea then part of the vast Roman Empire in Asia Minor, today İznik in Turkey, and through which in addition to the Easter greeting we will also affirm our faith. In the creed we read in the section concerning Jesus "On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures". The Hebrew Scriptures witness to Jesus as Messiah as the Apostolic Church went on at great length to demonstrate guided by the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Some years later the Church at another gathering added in the section on the Holy Spirit, "We look for the resurrection of the dead"! Today, reflecting the lovely images of the psalm we just heard, the churches of the Latin West and the Byzantine East - their calendars coinciding means this global fellowship is keeping Easter Day on the same day with its forty days - will also be greeting each other with the same greeting in Greek 'Christos anesti! - Alithos anesti!' and in Latin 'Christus surrexit! - Surrexit vere, alleluia!'

At the heart of today's service of celebration is joy. Joy that Christ is risen. Joy that God is for us. Joy that life is more than it seems. Joy because we know ourselves to be members of the communion of saints. Joy because we know our future is secure. Joy because we know that if we fall we fall into the hands of God. Joy because sin has been vanquished and the last enemy death destroyed. Joy because...

This foundational joy is present at all times, but today our focus is concentrated giving shape and nuance to our celebrations. I return to the "joy that life is more than it seems". The *more* is artistically and delightfully captured in a 16<sup>th</sup> century woodcut showing a human figure pushing their head through the firmament of heaven to find they are suddenly looking up into a sky they have never seen before, packed with strange stars. Even now, old hand that I am, I remain pleasantly surprised and even a little startled that adults, young and old, like to read theology. In essence to read theology as people is not unlike the image of a human figure pushing their head through the firmament of heaven with a new landscape stretched out before them as suggested in the woodcut. It looks funny this image. We can laugh honestly, but then we get it echoing words from the Book of Revelation, 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...' (Revelation 21.1)

Recently, by sheer chance, I was listening to a Swiss author Thomas Hürlimann (who I had never heard of before, honestly) recall his time as a pupil at the Benedictine monastery school of Einsiedeln, Switzerland. What struck me was his admiration for his teachers, all monks, and their wisdom and the generosity of the intellectual endeavour they encouraged, which gave Hürlimann so much and to which he tenderly testifies and how this beautiful experience on the one hand jarred with how on the other hand he experienced his time at the boarding element of the school and those who ran it. One was free and life-giving, the other was stifling and soul destroying, both part of the same institution, both Christian in name. By the way one of the great 20<sup>th</sup> leaders of the Austrian Catholic church, Franz König, Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal, and one of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the son of farmers, was himself a pupil at a Benedictine monastery: Melk.

Why am I sharing this with you on Easter Day I must ask myself – this day full of joy, of hope, and of a new found freedom? Because I am aware of the discrepancy that exists between what we are always becoming or to become as Christians and what we are at any one moment. Hürlimann gives us a glimpse of what the Christian community is at its best, a place of exploration, a place of freedom, a community united in a common endeavour, referential, life-giving, guided, nurtured and nursed by people of Christian faith under God and at its worst a place of imprisonment. The latter I should never want to be a part of, but of the former always. But as we come to know, knowing ourselves, life is not black and white. I know what we can be because of Christ risen and this inspires. I know what we often are and this is anything but inspiring. I do not need to look farther than myself.

My brother tells me from time to time, reminds me, that I said to him in a moment of sanity during my last year of Senior School year (Oberprima), while at a boarding school attached to a state school the Ostseegymnasium in Timmendorfer Strand, that my going to university in Halifax, Canada would make or break me. Sounds dramatic, doesn't it? Well the long and short of it is that it did make me in as much as during that time through the Christian community there, the worship offered and my brother's faith I returned to the Christian faith, which in turn opened the door to the Christian vocation and the ministry I am called to serve in the church. Like Hürlimann I was inspired by a Christian intellectual community, not as diverse as this one, wrestling with the issues of the day not given to academic fads and having to pay the price. Academia is not a safe haven for those who by necessity and the call to integrity question the consensus.

Each of us has their Christian biography. In some little way I hope that mine has reminded you of your own making today both personal in an intimate way, but not losing sight of what Augustine in a one-liner, I have a disposition to one-liners, grasped all those years ago. 'We are an Easter people!' Let us say it together 'We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!'

As a Christian with a calling I find I must return to the beginnings of my Christian adult pilgrimage time and time again throughout this transitory life to find orientation believing in the resurrection of the dead because Christ is risen, death has no more dominion over Him. One of the things I sensed then was a need to be concerned for the unity of the Church. Each new

fragmentation in the church since has caused pain, while some have seemingly welcomed it forgetting to count the cost. Today we celebrate with joy that we are united in a common faith that is life-affirming and is life-giving, because Christ is risen, risen from the dead. I give thanks for the hope that is mine because of Christ Jesus risen. Can you? I give thanks that I know where true joy and peace can found because Christ is risen. Can you?

In drawing to a close it is my wish to share a fellow pilgrim's thought process, someone with faith like you and me, who did not shy away from the demands of faith finding it to be life-giving in the end. It was good she faced a hard question. It was good she wrestled with God. Tough lady. In the words of the Beatles song Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, 'Let me introduce to you the one and only...' Sandra Peniston-Bird, a former member of this congregation, the gentlest of souls, who with us and like us believed in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Sandra was puzzled by the question of how she could love God more than she could love her own children until she came to the realisation that in loving God she loved her daughters more. Simply beautiful. Makes sense. Thank you, Sandra. It is not less, it is always more this Christian life we inhabit.

May we all be granted through commonly held Christian faith come to know that in loving God our love for others is in no way diminished, but is instead the "more" that Easter Day so peacefully welcomes in. As a good friend always writes at Easter quoting Gerard Manley Hopkins, who turns Easter the noun into a verb, 'Let Christ easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-cresseted east,... Indeed **Amen. Amen.**