

Easter Day, 2024, Mark 16.1-8

Today Christians the world over have gathered, are gathering, and will gather to greet each other saying, Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Christus ist auferstanden! Er ist wahrhaftig auferstanden! Christos Anesti! Allithos Anesti! These are but three of hundreds of languages by which Christians across the world are greeting each other today reminding us if we needed reminding that the Easter message is for all.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! What sort of greeting is this? Well, it is particular. It is particular to Christians. It is one of our distinguishing characteristics. We have something unique to tell the world. Christ is risen! Death has no more dominion over Him and therefore over us. The greeting sets the Christian apart calling us into a new reality and a new way of life in Christ. The greatest gift is the gift of life, but on becoming a Christian, the greatest gift is the new life in Christ knowing yourself a part of the new creation, which is no longer under the dominion of sin and death, but rather is a life set free from sin and death. One more time the greatest gift is the gift of life, but when you become a Christian, it is the new life in Christ, the greater gift, this new creation. As Christians we are always doubly grateful. We are wonderfully made in God's image. Each and every one called to reflect the glory of God, and now through Christ's death and resurrection, the stone having been rolled away by an unseen hand, the possibility of becoming a new creation in Him is open to us.

We have a message to proclaim! The message is multifaceted, as we have been learning throughout Holy Week once again, since embarking on the journey that takes us from Palm Sunday, via Maundy Thursday to Good Friday and on to Easter Day and the empty tomb. Christ is risen. He is risen from the dead. The Church will in time learn more fully what this means for Christian being and living, for the Church and for the world.

I wish to connect with Palm Sunday's sermon to take us forward into Easter and on to Galilee. On Palm Sunday I spoke of how God in Christ identifies absolutely with our human condition. We see this specifically manifested in his passion and death. Through Mary his mother he becomes one of us. 'Human condition' is a slightly technical phrase, but what the phrase is pointing us to is that God identifies with that which he has created. He identifies with His creation and wonderfully with our existence as humans in that God in Christ becomes a particular human being. By doing so God in Christ affirms the gift of life, and the goodness of creation, its value you might say, while accepting that each life is marked by constraints say of time and space, sin and death but is also always full of possibility. Consider for a moment our ingenuity, our resilience, our capacity for empathy... as human beings.

In life there is joy. There is sadness. There is celebration. There is lament. There is suffering. There is healing. There is being understood. And there is not being understood. There is being accepted. And there is not being accepted. God in Christ doesn't make a detour around living a full life, but rather goes through it at a high cost to himself, so that we might have life and have it in abundance. That we might not wish our lives away, but rather that we take hold of them. Jesus does not shrink from the confrontation that lies ahead. Going through life throughout means that whatever life has in store for him he will face it. It means going through death on a tree, the cross, by means of the Roman death penalty, crucifixion. Why, because at the core of Christ's example is a fundamental unshakeable trust in God, the God of His ancestors, who is also the God of His present and yes for those who believe of this very moment.

As the seal of the Easter candle is broken at the Easter Vigil, symbolising the breaking of the seal that is death and sin the celebrant says,
Christ yesterday and today,

the beginning and the end,
Alpha and Omega,
all time belongs to him,
and all ages;
to him be glory and power,
through every age and for ever.

The women in today's Gospel ask, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' The stone they are asking about is, of course, the stone that sealed Christ's tomb. It is only when they look up being downcast through the heavy weight of grief (from the Greek *anablepimai*) that they realise the stone has been rolled away for them and for us. As of yet the women do not know what this means for them. This little cameo is given to encourage us also to look up with the women and see that the seal has been broken, to observe, to discern, be attentive to, to be aware of as we sing, 'Jesus lives! By this we know, thou O grave, canst not enthrall [bind] us!' When we embark on the adventure of Christian faith we like the women do know what this will come to mean for us and moreover what it will ask of us.

We speak of an empty tomb, which to my mind is a slightly unfortunate phrase as it masks the Easter message which it is meant to convey. The first Easter message is simply. "Don't be alarmed. Jesus is not here; he is risen. He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, as he promised." (preacher's paraphrase of Mark 16.1-8) **This** 'you will see him in Galilee as he promised' takes us back to the night on which Jesus gifted us this meal, The Lord's Supper. Jesus now on the Mount of Olives with its view of Jerusalem shortly before his arrest tells his disciples that none of them will stay the course. All of them will become deserters. And to Peter's horror he too will be counted amongst the deserters though for now he protests. Peter will be the last of the disciples to give up on Jesus. Peter's restoration at the Sea of Galilee is one of the most moving scenes in the gospels as Peter says in desperation, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' (John

21:17) But before Peter's protestations he will deny Jesus three times. It is on the Mount of Olives that Jesus promises, 'But when I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.' (Mark 14:28)

It is this 'going ahead of you' – announced in the Empty Tomb and the reality it points to – is where I wanted to land this Easter Day. The women and the disciples return to Galilee to resume their lives. It is there the women and men encounter Jesus, the Risen Christ, in their everyday existence, in their former lives. We know that some of them were fishermen, one was a tax collector, another had been a Zealot, but it is unclear what other professions the disciples practised. Amongst the women we know of a mother, a widow, a woman whom Jesus had restored to community having become an outcast. It is a right motley (kunterbunt) group. Mark's Easter message in the Empty Tomb especially mentions Peter, because after denying Jesus three times, he breaks down and weeps. He is ashamed. His bravura was all talk. A message is passed to Peter via the women who were Jesus' and his companions: I am going ahead to Galilee for you as well. Know this, Peter.

The Easter message is for all people. The Easter message is sin and death have no more dominion over us because of God's saving action. The Easter message is we can become a new creation in Christ. The Easter message is we are to look to heavenly things, rather than earthly things. The Easter message is we find life in no longer living to ourselves, but to God. The Easter message is a perspective changing message. It is life changing. It is transforming. The beauty of the motley group is their faith and how they will live and spread this faith by which communities spring up across the Mediterranean world cascading down to the Anglican community who built this church in the 19th century and us today. The Easter message also tells us that God who raised Jesus from the dead is always going before us, he is ahead of us. The God in whom Jesus trusted and by whom

Jesus was raised is present as he was present at Golgotha, the place of the skull and to be encountered in life, in our relationships, amongst colleagues, family, and last but not least fellow Christians. The Easter message is one of assurance. Do not be alarmed or more commonly do not be afraid. Jesus has kept his promise. Today Christians the world over are singing,

The powers of death have done their worst,
but Christ their legions has dispersed.
Let shouts of holy joy outburst.
Alleluia!

There is a sting this side of eternity. The powers of death are legion as the hymn states. What is described here by the word legion meaning many is not just physical death (enemy enough and the last to be vanquished as Paul writes 1 Corinthians 15:26), but all those things that destroy relationships, cooperation, mutual flourishing, building peace, regard for the other etc. These powers are many. They are legion. In Christ they need no longer have dominion over us. Let us live in the Easter message reality as Gerard Manley Hopkins urges us to in one of his celebrated poems,

Let Him [Christ] easter in us,
be a dayspring to the dimness of us,
be a crimson-cressed east. — Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*

Alleluia, Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! Alleluia!