

## **Easter 2018**

10.30am Cathedral Choral Eucharist  
Romans 5.1-11; John 20.1-18

### **Telling the Story Forwards**

Our youthful and musically accomplished choir has offered us some moments of near perfection over the last few days, moments of nerve-tingling beauty and intense passion. Thank you to them, to the clergy and to the many others who have helped us to enter more deeply into the mystery of death and new birth that is the reason we're here today.

Worship is very much not just for the youthful and talented, of course, or for the theologically literate or, for that matter, for the happy and contented. It's also for those of us who look in the mirror and see, etched on our faces, the scars of experience and, in our eyes, evidence of failure and disappointment. And most particularly Easter is for those of us who arrive in church this morning harrowed by death and loss – who long for the message to be true that, one day, like Mary Magdalene in the garden, they'll be able to call their loved ones once again by name and, perhaps, unlike Mary Magdalene, be allowed to hold onto them for ever.

In our imperfect world, our church liturgies are intended to give us a glimpse of perfection, of a better existence where there is order and shape, where for an hour or two we can bring our disordered and misshapen lives with us, conscious of the gaze of God and acknowledge that God is the One who made us and remakes us. Just as Jesus' wounds in his hands, feet and side are evident in his resurrection body, so we bring our wounded lives, not to be smartened up or erased, as if somehow they are of no lasting consequence, but to be embraced and transfigured by God's acceptance and constancy.

This is why it's important that you are here this morning, why I am here. We come as we are, we stand beside others who, like us are a curious mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous and, as such, together we bear witness that we are included into God's purposes for humanity that, indeed, no one is excluded. This is a joyful truth, it's a daft idea, it's a sort of April Fool's joke and yet it's one that affirms a dangerous truth.

Everything we do today would make no sense whatsoever were it not for the resurrection. Our hymns and bible readings, our prayers, all assume the resurrection. And right at the heart of it all is, in the words of Rowan Williams, 'a resurrection shaped' event. God welcomes all to share a meal, where bread and wine, the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands, make God present to us and remind us that 'Jesus lives!'

For, something happened back then in those days after his death, something the church struggled to put into words. We've heard one story of how the great apostle, Mary Magdalene, experienced it; but there are other versions. Each of the four gospels tells it differently – one version of Mark's gospel ends starkly with the discovery of an empty tomb and the women, who discover it, being too afraid to tell anyone. We hear of a Jesus who eats and is hungry, who cooks fish on a charcoal fire and yet who passes through locked doors and can come and go in an instant.

Yet it was this 'something' that made all the difference, that caused the New Testament to be written and the church to come into being. It's often said that the four gospels were written backwards. In other words, the resurrection comes first and only then does all the rest, Jesus' birth and teaching and death make sense and come into focus. The story would not be told the way it is, the story would not be told at all were it not for the Resurrection. But even so, as St Paul put it, we still only 'see in a mirror dimly.'

The extraordinary thing is that the reason we're here today is because we believe that the 'something' that happened back then, continues to happen and that this makes all the difference to how we see ourselves and the world we live in. That it presents us with a God who refuses to accept rejection and who never responds to violence and blame with anything other than faithfulness, generosity and forgiveness. God who, far from saying that this world is of no consequence and our bodies a mere convenience, shows through the resurrection body of Jesus that our bodily existence and the material world we inhabit matters.

*This* is the dangerous truth of our faith in Christ. For it stands in stark contrast to that chilling (and deeply ironic) statement made by the High Priest, Caiaphas, that, 'it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' (Jn 11.50) Chilling, because this counsel of expediency has such a contemporary ring and because, by the calculations that all political leaders have to make, he may have been right. Expediency suggests that some must suffer for the greater good. Yet expediency is also used to excuse all sorts of excesses, including the so-called collateral damage of modern warfare.

We learn it early in our lives, in our fight for survival, in our competition for limited resources. The mantra 'I've got to do what's best for me', is hard to contest, yet our sense of what's best for me quickly becomes corrupted into what's 'comfortable' for me, what protects my assets, maintains my power, what defends my family, my tribe or nation at the expense of others. Mercy, justice rarely outplay these considerations.

It is expedient that homes are bombed, children orphaned, bodies maimed, boatloads of refugees drowned, ex-spies

poisoned, concert-goers blown-up, pedestrians mowed down. Expedient. Expedient for someone who rates their self-interest above their care for others. Yet the dangerous truth we affirm today, in affirming the resurrection, is that expediency can never be our rule of life for it never reflects the character of the God we know in Jesus; it can never be the aspiration of those who, like us, seek to live in step with Jesus, those who find themselves sharing in the life of Jesus through the bread and wine; those who occupy the same space as Jesus. This is dangerous and it is costly because, amongst other things, the resurrection of Jesus tells us that to God there aren't different categories of human, that no one person is worth more than another, that each of us is equally precious to God – and that this denies us the luxury of treating faceless others as expendable.

I said a moment ago that the gospels tell the story of Jesus backwards from the resurrection. The resurrection changed everything, it introduced a new age, different from the age before, an age when Christ is alive, free to act in the world and therefore in each of us. It is for us, therefore, who claim to be citizens of this new age, to tell the same story forwards from the resurrection and to discover, at Easter 2018, what that means for the world we inhabit and how, within that world, we are to live our lives.

*Come risen Jesus, help us to live the truth of your resurrection; to experience it, to share it, to bear its cost and to know its joy. In your name we ask. Amen.*