

Sermon – Easter (Dawn)

Good morning everyone and happy Easter. In the words of Matthew's Gospel – "...sing choirs of earth! Behold, your light has come! The glory of the Lord shines radiantly! Lift up your hearts, for Christ has conquered death! The night is past; the day of light is here..."

Last year, on Easter Sunday, I began by asking a question – I asked you to think about the who was raised up from the dead on that first Easter morning.

In particular, I shared with you my belief that the resurrection must always be more than just a story about something that happened a long time ago. It's more than just a story about Jesus. The resurrection is timeless – It's a blessing and a hope that we share today. It's the gift of new life – a life that breaks through the barrier of death. So, the resurrection doesn't just belong to a single moment in time – it's timeless - it belongs to all of us – in every generation.

Today, we celebrate a gift that can be experienced in every corner of the world – a gift that has the power to reach us and those in need, even in these times of grief and loss (especially in the experience of grief and loss). Resurrection has the power to transform us and renew us.

And, surely, this is a message of hope and new life that needs to be shared today. As I said on Maundy Thursday, Easter is the celebration of a God who comes to us – A God who serves – a God who can be found in the care and concern of those around us. As the world continues its slow recovery from the Covid lockdowns that have kept us apart during this last year, I think this is a very powerful message. The resurrection of our Lord is the celebration of new life – the life that we are called to share with our Lord.

And, I think we see evidence of the resurrection in the world around us – in the care that many have received from the doctors and nurses working in our hospitals (in the sharing of vaccines with the elderly and others at risk) – we see evidence of a God who breathes life and hope into the sick and the suffering (these are signs of resurrection – and new life).

In the care and consideration of those working in our nursing homes and aged care facilities, we see God breathe life into the frail and the fearful. In the support networks and assistance offered to the unemployed during this last year - in cheap prescriptions for the sick and extended trading hours for the

elderly) – in all of these unexpected blessings we see the grace of God breath life and hope into the lives of the poor and the disadvantaged. Again, these are the experiences of resurrection that feed our faith.

The resurrection is not a story about one man's triumph over the power of death.

On this happy morning, we celebrate new hope – a new light in the world. And, without a doubt, on this day, we are called to celebrate this blessing of hope and light within our world. (we are involved – we are called to be part of this story.) Yes, today we touch the infinite and we share this day with those in need – we reach beyond the limits of time and space and share this day with Christ.

So again, who is raised from the dead in the celebration of Easter? This is the question that we ask today.

At the very heart of our Gospel reading, we hear a wonderful story about discovery. We hear a story about one woman's search for meaning, while struggling with a terrible grief – a terrible sense of loss.

Following the death of Jesus, as the dawn breaks on the first day of the new week, Mary Magdalene walks to the tomb of Jesus. (I imagine this was for Mary a time of great sadness – a time of shattered dreams.)

But, as she approaches the entrance of the tomb, she makes a life-changing discovery. The tomb is empty. Mary discovers that her teacher and friend has risen from the dead. She is greeted by an angel and then by the risen Christ, her Lord and master.

And, we see Mary transformed before our eyes. We see grief replaced by joy. We see desolation and despair replaced by new hope.

For Mary, on this new and glorious day, resurrection is not an idea or a symbol. For Mary, resurrection is the blessing that she receives – with joy and wonder.

And, of course, her life is never the same again. Imagine, if you can, the excitement she must have felt – the excitement and the joy of being reunited with her Lord.

So, who is raised from the dead?

What was it like for the other disciples, when they heard the news? Like Thomas, perhaps some of them thought it was too good to be true. But then,

when they met Christ face to face – when all their doubts were swept away, imagine how they must have felt.

Like Mary, the disciples were raised to new life – raised to new hope. And, we know that their faith was restored because they started to build the Church that we share today. They were all reborn.

So, Easter is the celebration of hope, new life and renewal – it's a time of discovery. We give and receive chocolate eggs at Easter, as symbols of new life. We celebrate the life of the risen Christ and we celebrate the faith and the hope that makes this life possible for us.

Like the seed that falls to the ground and dies in the earth, in order to be reborn, Mary and the disciples are resurrected with Christ – you and I are resurrected.

On Good Friday, Mary and the disciples were overwhelmed by grief and loss. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, their faith and their hopes were nailed up there with him. And, we experience this same death in our lives - and we see it in the suffering of those around us (especially in these troubling times). On Good Friday we die with Christ in order to be raised up with him. Like Mary and the disciples, we experience the sting of death, kneeling at the foot of the cross.

But, this isn't the end of the story.

Resurrection is a gift from God that we receive on the other side when we allow God's love and will to be born within us. Resurrection is food for the hungry and clothing for the naked and shelter for the homeless, care for the sick and vaccines for the vulnerable.

So, in this celebration of Easter, I pray that the resurrected Christ will be born within us and those living in the world around us, deepening our faith and strengthening us in our commitment to serve those in need. I pray that this Easter will be a time of renewal and rebirth for all of us.

He Lord be with you.