

Easter Morning 2018

Alleluia! The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

I may have told you this before, but some years ago I found myself in Los Angeles during Lent and, when reading the Los Angeles Times, saw an advert for 'The Joy of Easter,' – a celebration of the Easter story – taking place at the Crystal Cathedral in Anaheim. The paper gave it 5 stars and said, '*Possibly a more spectacular show than The Phantom of the Opera.*' Well, the opposite of wild horses and all that! So off I went to this great building, the largest glass church in the world, then a mega-church which had grown out of a drive-in church though the ministry of the evangelist Robert Schuller. Alas, once he retired and other members of his family took over the whole operation fell into insolvency, and the church is now in the process of being converted into a Roman Catholic cathedral – so a real cathedral at last –

As the LA Times predicted, I did experience the most amazing spectacle imaginable, complete with Roman soldiers on horseback, Pontius Pilate feeding meat to a live leopard – indeed the entire population of San Diego Zoo seemed to be present. We experienced the journey of Jesus until finally he was crucified, darkness fell within the building, the fifth largest organ in the world played soundly enough to simulate an earthquake, the whole side of the sanctuary swung open and Mary Magdalene reached a top C in *Jesus Christ is risen today*, whilst live angels floated (on wires) above our heads! It certainly was a spectacle. However, reflecting on the actual Resurrection, I fear that over the years the memory of this spectacle has seemed as insubstantial as unreal as fibre-glass snow-capped mountain of Disneyland which rises just a few blocks away from the Crystal Cathedral.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ represents the profoundest mystery within our humanity, and, indeed, within creation itself. Yet all we can grasp hold of are those moments recorded within the Gospels, and even within these, we seem to experience a divine game of hide-and-seek.

- Matthew gives us a great earthquake and an angel rolling back the stone before sitting on it, as the guards shake with fear and become like dead men.
- Mark the Gospel writer has the stone already rolled back and a young man sitting by it who tells the women that Jesus has risen. They run away terrified and amazed.
- Luke tells us that two men in dazzling clothes appear to the women who, again, terrified, bow their faces to the ground.

We have just heard John, and in this, as in the other accounts, the faithfulness of Mary Magdalene and the other women disciples of Jesus is the running theme of the Resurrection. John's account is the most vivid and colourful account particularly in the meeting of the Risen Lord with Mary Magdalene. She becomes the exemplar of discipleship - truly the Apostle to the Apostles - as she announces to them that she has seen the Lord.

Yet all these accounts say nothing in themselves of the mystery of the Resurrection itself, because even in the drama of Matthew's telling, (and Matthew does love to inject drama!) - even here - all of this is an after event. The Resurrection seems to me like a moment within

creation which is bound up in profound silence beyond creation and which takes us to the heart of God's profound love for each one of us and for the whole of humanity.

What does this mean? Mary Magdalene in her grief and feeling of abandonment only recognizes Jesus when he calls her by name; the disciples can't believe it is him until he eats with them; the doubting Thomas will only believe if he is able to touch the wounds. Even when Mary is filled with incomparable joy when Jesus calls her by name, she is told not to cling to the Risen Lord. In all these accounts there is a sense of journeying and, more importantly, of **transformation**. Ultimately the Holy Spirit – the inward working of God – will complete the Easter journey for the Apostles and disciples of the Lord, and this is the same for Christians ever since who know the Resurrection Life of Jesus through that self-same Spirit. His Resurrection from the dead is as much **OUR** resurrection as His. Indeed, we are called to Resurrection life, and this is as much about **here and now** as in the further promise of our eternal journey into the unity of God's Love. Easter calls us to the fulness of life here and now with our eyes fixed constantly on Jesus Christ.

Thus, in every situation, God wants us to know that: in our frailties, our weaknesses, addictions of problems – the Risen Christ seeks to draw us towards healing.

In our broken relationships, divisions, bereavements or losses – the Risen Christ stands alongside us offering the balm of love.

In those moments when we feel most alone – the risen Christ seeks to console us with the knowledge of his constancy which never fails.

In **every** aspect of our journey through life, the Risen Christ draws us to the knowledge that we are called to know the transformation of Easter in every moment. 'Mary,' says Jesus, and her call to Resurrection floods her life with an inextinguishable hope, joy and sense of new journeying. As he called her, so he calls each one of us by name on this Easter morning so that we too may continue to grow in the knowledge of a love which **never** fails. In all of our situations, Jesus is the answer.

The great American writer, John Updike, had this to say of the Resurrection:

**Let us not mock God with metaphor,
Analogy, sidestepping transcendence;
Making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the
Faded credulity of earlier ages:
Let us walk through the door.**

My friends, on this day of Alleluias, let us walk through the door to experience the transcendence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and as we break bread and share the cup together, know that he calls us by name - calls us to share his light with all whom we meet. To him be the glory for ever and ever.

Alleluia. The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia



Noli Me Tangere – Graham Sutherland (Chichester Cathedral)

Acts 10:34-43

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

John 20: 1-18

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.