

Remember the Future...

... Pick up the Challenge

The sermon given on Easter Day, 4th April 2021, by the Bishop of Argentina, the Rt Revd Nick Drayson, in the Attended Communion Service in the Minster.

John 20:1-18

Father, what we know not, teach us; what we have not, give us; and what we are not, make us; for Christ's sake. Amen.

One of the special things about Easter is the number of different ways it is celebrated. Some cultures have a very colourful way of doing so and others are very sombre or even bizarre way. One year we had the privilege of being in Rhodes on the Mediterranean for the Greek Orthodox Easter, and we witnessed the end of the Easter vigil and the beginning of Easter Day in the way the Greeks do it. And just as we lit the Easter candle this morning, the custom in that place which we witnessed and enjoyed, was seeing the whole village gather both inside and outside the parish church, each one with a candle. And as midnight came, the priest lit the candle and announced '**Christos Anesti; Alithos Anesti**': '**Christ is Risen; Christ is Risen Indeed.**' And then, people started lighting their candles from the Easter candle and gradually from each others' candles out into the whole village with their lit candles. And from there they went home or to their 'wherever they were going' with their lit candles. And etched in my memory is a picture of three girls getting into a taxi with three were lit candles - I'm not quite sure whether they got home with the candles still lit, but I thought this was a lovely image of taking the message, the light of Christ, out into the world. That is what we're doing. Even if we haven't got a lit candle this morning, the Easter candle reminds us of that, that today we announce: 'Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed'.

It's been a great delight to share with you online and in the Minster these last few days, memories that are at the heart of Holy Week: Jesus saying, "*Do this in remembrance of me*"; the thief saying, "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" And today, in a funny sort of way, we're remembering a future event because the resurrection has happened, but the resurrection hasn't completely happened, as we will see.

St. Paul says this, "*Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above; for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*" I'd like to ask this morning, when did all this happen or when will it happen? Have we been raised with Christ

or will we be raised with Christ? And as we consider these questions, I want to do it by looking at three girls, not the three same three girls who got into the taxi with their candles, but three girls who had questions and two are from the gospel and one is contemporary.

First of all, in our gospel reading, Mary Magdalene asked where they put Jesus so she could get him. Mary had been one of the last to stay by the cross when Jesus was dying. She was now one of the first to go to the tomb while it was still dark. She then comes and goes three times, first to get Peter and John when she discovers the stone has been rolled away, then to tell the other disciples that she's met Jesus.

And in a way, it's all so 'matter of fact': a quiet, workaday morning; no one around because, of course, the Jewish Sabbath was the Saturday; it was almost as if Sunday had passed and it was time to go to work on Monday, Jesus got up and left; the grave clothes neatly folded; an angel at each end of the place where he'd been laid; a gardener who asked why she was crying and then spoke her name.

But it's John who claims to be the first to understand what had happened- he saw and believed. But Mary is the first to see him, though something stops her recognising him. And then Jesus says, *"Don't hold on to me. I have not yet returned to the Father"*, as this somehow will be the key to everything that had happened.

Over the centuries, countless people have studied these same bits of evidence: the empty tomb; the eyewitness reports; the changed lives - and concluded, some reluctantly, that he did indeed come back to life and therefore was who he said he was and could do what he claimed he could do and had promised to, and this is somehow God's verdict in bringing him back to life, overturning the world's verdict crucifying him as an impostor.

And this morning, Jesus calls each one of us by name, "Mary", whatever your name is. He knows us and he asks us, *"Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"* So Mary may have been the first to have a conversation with the risen Jesus, but she was not the first to talk to him about rising from the dead.

Another girl, Martha, had asked Jesus why he'd let her brother die or at least she accused him of doing so and was told that Lazarus will rise again. She replied, *"I know he'll rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* This was, of course, the Jewish belief that a general resurrection would accompany the end-times and bring vindication to God's people. But Jesus's reply to her there is astonishing. In the midst of her grief and

questioning, he announces, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."* He then calls Lazarus out of the grave. This resurrection is so different from Jesus' resurrection in many ways, it's very public; noisy even; results in great publicity; and even causes Lazarus to receive death threats. And of course, Lazarus does eventually die again. But Jesus's claim is the most astounding thing: 'the resurrection is now, and it is me' he says. And Paul describes his resurrection as being the *first-born from the dead, the first fruits of them that slept*, implying that others will follow - there will be a general resurrection, but this is a foretaste of the end-times - it's begun.

To say 'I am the resurrection and the life' is a little bit like saying 'I am your team winning the cup final'; or 'I am the end of the pandemic' - a longed for future event come into the present, and 'I am the life' - we'll come to that.

When we recite the Creed, we say we believe that he rose again on the third day, but we also say we believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, by which may mean that remembering the resurrection is a little bit like back to the future. The basic message is: this is the future now; the end times have begun; but not in their entirety - as Paula Gooder puts it, 'like a slice of one day being displaced into another.' Jesus' resurrection was a slice of end-times occurring about 2000 years ago, and the event of the resurrection continues to allow us to experience that slice of the end times now. This isn't just theory, this is useful and we need to think about how creation is groaning or when we ask questions about death and loved ones, Paul uses the language of hope: in Romans, the creation was subjected to frustration by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Or about us: *"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and becoming like him in his death."*

Of course, no one knows what will happen after death. Henri Nouwen says this, "The resurrection does not answer any of our curious questions about life after death, but it does reveal to us that indeed love is stronger than death. After that revelation, we must remain silent, leave the whys, wheres, hows and whens behind and simply trust." Paul said, *"For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people."* But on a more positive note, he goes on to say, *"He will*

transform our lowly bodies so they will be like his glorious body; so it will be with the resurrection of the dead: sown a natural body; raised a spiritual body."

A third girl to ask a question is not in the Bible. In fact, her mother we've already mentioned Paula Gooder is the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and has written an excellent book called 'Our Risen Existence'. She describes how her young daughter, one evening at dinner asked, "How does Jesus make us real?" And while she and her husband were grasping for ways of answering her, she said, "Does he draw us first and then colour us in afterwards?" Her answers are in the book, but here are some thoughts: belief in the resurrection is an act of rebellion; a refusal to accept the world as it is; a perspective that looks backward to the resurrection and forward to the end times; recognising traces of the resurrection and end times in what is happening now; when we become people who bear resurrection with us wherever we go.

First, Jesus draws us. He then proceeds to colour us in. There, we become increasingly shaped by him until in our resurrected bodies, the whole of our being is infused with the things of the Spirit, and Christ's resurrected life becomes not just a part, but the whole of who we are.

So how does this work? How does it all fit together? Our identification with these shaped and shared memories is surely what being in Christ, as Paul puts it, is all about: repeatedly we are told, "I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me; we were buried with him through baptism, into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too may live a new life."

This last quote reminds us of another Easter custom that goes right back to the early church and in recent years has been rediscovered in this diocese. Baptisms on Easter Day - catechism during lent - those being baptised, dressed in white, being received into the death and resurrection of Jesus and the life of his people - this corporate memory. And some people have taken the opportunity on a day like today to renew their baptism vows: in baptism, we symbolically die with Christ and rise with him past, present and future. We are bound up with him, the resurrection and the life.

And I would like to give us that opportunity this morning to allow Jesus to colour us in a bit more; to think, maybe we were baptised a very long time ago; maybe we haven't been baptised - but to think, 'Today, we are in the presence of the Risen Christ; we are in the presence of the people of God, the body of Christ.' And we can all make that step. Jesus

wants to make it real for us. Maybe it's a start. Maybe it's a new start. But may I invite you to be **in** Christ, to discover your place **in** Christ, **in** the resurrection this morning. Jesus' resurrection transformed Jesus from death to life, transformed time, bringing the end-times into the present, but also transforms us, let us not get too accustomed to not changing.

Remember the future, pick up the challenge, light the candle and join others in taking the candle into the taxi and out into the world. We become people who bear resurrection with us wherever we go.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, you were dead, but now you are alive. Transform the torments of this world's sin that we may see your radiant glory. You were raised from death to life, may the power of your resurrection live in us, that we may be channels of your true life beyond measure.

To you, Jesus, who have broken free from the bonds of death, be honour and glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

Reading Text

John 20.1-18

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The Resurrection of Jesus

¹ 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. ² 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.' ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ 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. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look* into the tomb; ¹² 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. ¹³ 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.' ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 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.' ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew,* 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ 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."' ¹⁸ 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.