

Easter Day April 16 2017 Cathedral

Acts 10: 34-43 John 20: 1-18

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

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We have come together to celebrate Christ's resurrection from the dead. As we look back over this past year and the tumultuous changes and challenges the world has experienced, we give our thanks and our relief that love is greater than all the evils and wrongs of the world, is greater than death, greater than the world's anxiety, fear, despair, and its increasing belligerence.

Jesus embodied God's love for the world through his care and compassion, his kindness and forgiveness. He embodied it too through his challenge to those who diminish love, who think only of themselves and the small world they have created around them. This same Jesus was killed by those who could not bear the totality and wonder of God's love, and this same Jesus came back from the dead.

It is crucial in these days for us to remember he is risen not *out of* the world, or *away from* the world, or into some ghostly spiritual state, but *into* the world, *into* our world, *into* his world, this down to earth world. He came back from the dead so evidently into this down to earth world so one of those closest to him thought he looked just like the gardener.

The same person his followers had known before his crucifixion, who had been nailed to a cross and died a most horribly painful and anguished death, that same person has come back from the dead. He looks like the gardener. He tells doubting Thomas to put his hand in his side and in the holes in his hands and feet. He cooks fish on the beach for breakfast with his friends. The same person.

My utter conviction that love has overcome evil, that love endures, is rooted in my belief that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. That is the only way I can understand what the Gospels tell us, what Paul tells us in his letters, and what the startling start of the church in the most unlikely circumstances tells us.

I say all that, but of course there is also something different about him. The difference is there in the same Gospel stories that prove to me and many of the rest of us that he rose bodily from the dead.

After all, Mary Magdalene did think he looked like the gardener – she didn't recognise him, not at first. Nor did any of the disciples in most of his appearances to them – on the road to Emmaus, or when he was standing on the beach before cooking breakfast. He was the same but he wasn't quite.

Then, he seems to have been able to appear, and disappear suddenly. He appeared to the disciples on the first Easter night when they were gathered in a locked room. He appeared and then disappeared with the disciples walking to Emmaus. And of course, at the end of all the Gospels he disappears totally.

So there is another dimension, there are other dimensions. Jesus is risen into this world, in a way that is specific, but in a way too that transcends it. He is not confined by it in time and place, and most of us know from our own experiences of faith, that he is alive, transcending time and space.

So it is that by Jesus' resurrection we declare death has been defeated, the power of evil overcome and the deadly power of sin been cast off. And because we no longer live in fear of death, we are able to live lovingly and wholeheartedly not for ourselves but selflessly for the sake of others. We live lovingly, selflessly in the present because in Jesus' death and resurrection, God has taken care of the future.

So we do not subscribe to the world's outlook that disparages and demeans, that discounts and diminishes other men, women and children. We do not think life is just about us and what works for us.

And because we know the power of evil is overcome, we are able to work for justice and peace in the world with hope and confidence, knowing that we will make a difference and that everything we do, however small or big, for justice and peace will make a difference. And when we know the grip of sin is broken, we give thanks that whatever sin we fall into, and we all do and will, God will forgive us, and because of that we can work for forgiveness and reconciliation.

This is a very different way of life than the one we are urged to live by the pressures and self-serving demands of so much in our world. It is a way of life we see over and over again in selfless loving lives. In those who choose not to succumb to selfishness, unkindness, inward-looking lives - the opposite of lives of resurrection of love.

And we do all this – living lovingly and wholeheartedly for others, working for justice and peace in the world, striving for forgiveness and reconciliation - we do all this not because we must, but because we have experienced the power of love, God's risen love, in our own lives. Our acts of love, of justice, of generosity, of kindness, of forgiveness, all flow from experiencing this ourselves. Each of us has known, does know, and will know the risen Christ in our lives.

Perhaps like Mary Magdalene, we have been met by the Risen Christ in our grief, our loss, our desolation, our aloneness. Somehow, a word, a gesture, an act of kindness from another has touched us in our isolation and despair. The touch of God's love.

Or like Mary Magdalene, we have experienced that mysterious sense of being known, of being understood in ways we do not understand ourselves, we have heard our name called out to us and known in that moment that we are valued, treasured, held in God's love.

Or like Mary Magdalene, we have been given a new sense of direction and purpose in our lives, a task, a calling that gives us meaning and sense. That our world that was making little sense does now make sense for us, because of the call of God's love.

As overwhelming, even incomprehensible, as the Resurrection of Jesus is, the power of Jesus' risen life comes to us in small and big ways. God touches our lives with Jesus' risen life at moments when we need it, at moments we do not know we need it, in ways we may not at first recognise, in ways by which know how precious each of us is to God.

And God does that here for us this morning, in that very clear small way, of being present to us together here in a tiny piece of bread, a sip of wine, a small way miraculously bearing the truth and power of the Resurrection.

Our response is gratitude – gratitude that turns into acts of love, kindness, gentleness, generosity and forgiveness, connecting to the reality woven into the world by the resurrection, that love has overcome evil and death, so that with thanksgiving and conviction we cry out

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