

## **Easter Sunday 2020. Revd David Treharne**

*Vicar of Tidenham with Beachley and Lancaut and Priest in Charge of St Briavels with Hewelsfield & Brockweir.*

Happy Easter to you all. This is a very strange Easter for all of us. We're used to family gatherings, getting out and about if the weather is nice and, of course most importantly gathering together as a community of faith to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It is the highlight of the year for all Christian communities!

There are all kinds of consequences of not being able to gather together physically as the church at this time. We are not being able to receive holy communion, although I invite you to make spiritual communion today and there is guidance for you on the Parish website. Another consequence of us not gathering together is that I may end up having to go to the dentist! I have 90+ (I've eaten a few already) Cadbury's Cream Eggs here that were going to be given out!!

*One of the usual customs on Easter Sunday is taking Holy Communion. The Book of Common Prayer states, "every Parishioner shall communicate at the least three times in the year, of which Easter to be one." Unfortunately, we cannot currently do this. However, I will be leading a Eucharist today and invite all those who participate in the service to make 'spiritual communion.'*

*The Book of Common Prayer instructs us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', although we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves. Making a Spiritual Communion is particularly fitting for those who cannot receive the sacrament at the great feasts of the Church, and it fulfils the duty of receiving Holy Communion 'regularly, and especially at the festivals of Christmas, Easter and Whitsun or Pentecost' (Canon B 15).*

*The Church of which we are members is not defined by the walls of a building but by the Body of Christ of which we are members. In making our communion spiritually, we are joining with Christians everywhere to be nourished by the one who tells us, 'I am the Bread of Life'.*

"Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed Alleluia."

I wonder if in these troubled times these words could potentially grate with some of you? Against the backdrop of 10,000's of deaths from the coronavirus, a national emergency and all that is accompanying it, I whether this acclamation might seem disconnected from reality, insensitive to the moment or perhaps even crass?

When conducting a funeral the role of the Christian minister is to speak words of hope and life into situations of despair and death; speak good news where there has been bad news; light a candle in the darkness. It is not unusual for the circumstances to be quite bleak and lacking in hope. So when I start talking about life, hope and resurrection it might at first seem to grate... and I will say that to the families. But you can feel the atmosphere change as words of hope and life as spoken appropriately into the situation... not least because people are longing for hope and life!

Jesus speaks life to death. Life is greater than death. Love is stronger than death! He speaks forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, hope, joy, healing and wholeness to the full extent of human sinfulness, separation and brokenness.

He is life and his words are life. He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14). He is the resurrection and the life (John 11). His whole time on earth is 'life giving'. "I have come that you might have life." (John 10)

This is the Christian faith. It is the Easter message. It is the Good News for **all** the world. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ death and despair, demons and disobedience, defilement, desolation and diseases do not have the last word! Jesus Christ has the last word. He is the first word and the last word. The Alpha and the Omega. The beginning and the end. As I have said on many occasions during the last year, 'his resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing.'

*In the resurrection account in Luke's gospel it is said that Mary returned to the disciples with news of the resurrection, and it seemed to them an idle tale. They couldn't take in a message of good news in their grief and loss. Mary's testimony felt disconnected from their reality, insensitive to the moment, and probably crass to the majority!*

Jesus speaks lovingly and powerfully into our lives and our world. He is of course, as St John writes at the beginning of his gospel, the WORD made flesh who took on and shared and spoke into our humanity. Jesus fully shared our human life with all its joys and the depths of suffering and death... so that we might be reconciled to God and share his life and resurrection. We're back to Christmas and the fulfilment of the incarnation... Jesus coming to be where we are in order that we can go to where he is. He became what we are in order that we might become what he is. Jesus obliterated the barrier between us and God to give us life.

*What he did not assume he could not heal or redeem* Gregory of Nazianzus. Jesus fully shares our physical, psychological and spiritual human experience, that we might unite ourselves with him to share in his life, the life of God.

It's worth recognising that the initial message of resurrection goes out in the midst of death. Indeed there would be no resurrection without there first having been death! There is no Easter Sunday without the full physical, psychological and spiritual depths of Good Friday.

In John's resurrection account, which we read today (John 20:1-18), Mary goes in search of Jesus' body with Peter and John. Peter and John go back home and Mary is left outside the tomb weeping in the face of death.

Jesus stands before Mary but Mary doesn't realise it is Jesus. Jesus says to Mary "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" She thinks it is the gardener. "Sir, tell me where you have put his body and I will get him." Jesus then says, "Mary," at which point she realises who it is.

Jesus speaks to Mary's deepest hurt and despair and not for the first time in her life speaks life.

Later in the gospel, as we'll hear over the coming weeks, Jesus appears to the disciples and speaks life and peace to them behind locked doors... lockdown! It's a scene of fear and isolation for that group of people that resonates to us too in lock down for fear and reality of this coronavirus. But locked doors, locked hearts, fear and isolation, individual and corporate sin, death and despair are no barrier to the risen Jesus. There is no darkness, even the darkness of hell that Jesus won't inhabit with his presence and speak to. "Resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing."

But it is worth realising that it takes a little time for the resurrection reality to hit home. For Mary it takes a little while before she realises that Jesus it is before her.

For the disciples it takes a little longer, including for doubting Thomas for whom it is a week. For others, it's a lot longer.

And for us in our lives and those in situations of trauma it may take a while for the resurrection reality to hit home.

Many years ago I knew of a Parish that was in vacancy. The visiting priest turned up full of the joys of Easter. As they announced "Alleluia, Christ is risen" they couldn't understand why the congregation wasn't responding with "He is risen indeed, Alleluia! The reason was, that the Churchwarden had unexpectedly died a few days before Easter. They were experiencing Good Friday.

The great joy and truth of Easter at that moment felt disconnected, insensitive and crass. It took a while for resurrection hope to sink in!

And it may take a while before some of us hear and recognise the risen Jesus speaking to us!

My hope today is that all of us who are confined to our homes, save for essential duties, and that all those facing trauma or a living hell, will hear the risen Jesus speaking our individual names and speaking words of life and hope and peace to the deepest and darkest places of our hearts and lives... he's been there... and bring new life... eternal life! As he shares our human depths and death may we share in his life and resurrection!

It was a powerful moment when Mary heard the risen Jesus speaking to her. It was a powerful moment when the disciples encountered the risen Jesus' presence and his words. It is a powerful moment and experience for us when we too encounter the risen Lord Jesus and realise him speaking life and peace to the depths of our hearts and situations. It is a powerful moment, a powerful truth to realise that resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing.

Far from being disconnected, insensitive and crass the resurrection is hope and life... and a cause for Alleluia.

As St Augustine of Hippo says... *"We are an Easter people and 'Alleluia' is our song!"*  
I wish you all a very happy Easter.