

St Mary-le-Tower Ipswich

Easter Sermon 2014

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Text: Matthew 28.1-10

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.' So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

Sermon

The world needs to hear the good news of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The world needs to hear it so that people's hope may not be just for this world; it needs to hear it so that they can have faith in the true character of God that Jesus revealed; and it needs to

know it so that they can know that they themselves are deeply and unconditionally loved and accepted by God. The Resurrection is about Hope, faith and love, and our mission, our call as a church, here in the heart of Ipswich, is to know this hope, faith and love so well in our own souls, so deeply, that our life together simply glows with it.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ reveals the promise of heaven. It is a promise and not a threat; a promise to all who are ready to live that new life of God's Kingdom, that living closer to the God who loves us so much, that living much more in tune with his purposes, and much less dragged down by our own human weakness and sin.

People often struggle to imagine what heaven will really be like, and the trouble is that we are so limited by our present experience. It's difficult to imagine anything really different. We can think certainly of being reunited with those whom we love. We can think certainly of freedom from suffering. We can think certainly of a world freed from evil. We can think certainly of being free from our own sin. We can think certainly of some kind of reward for all the ways we have tried to live a good life. But whilst all of these ideas have some kernel of truth in them, none of them really gets to core of what heaven is about.

The Christian view of heaven is that it is a life of knowing ever more surely and deeply and absolutely, that you are held in God's love. I have no real idea what that living will entail, but I do know that it will all be about the overwhelming love of God, and that this is what will make it heaven. Frankly that is all that really matters; I can trust God for the rest.

The thing is, having faith that this is the essential character of heaven, of being held deeply in God's love; having this kind of faith means that I can begin to live this life more and more, in faith and trust that God's love extends to this life too. I can in this life too, begin to live the life of heaven, through faith in God's love, in the love of God revealed by Jesus Christ on the cross. This hope and faith and love sets me free. It can set you free too: to be more your true self, to live less for self and more for others, to be secure in the love and grace of God.

The world needs to hear all this because insecurity and selfishness lie behind so many of the world's ills: behind greed, behind fear of neighbour, behind blind loyalty to culture, behind religious extremism, behind racism and sexism and the denial of human rights, behind the desire to possess and to control and to dominate. All can in fact be treated by the medicine of the Gospel, the Good News of the promise of heaven, the assurance of God's love; revealed in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. On a clear day we can see our home in heaven and that can change our perspective on everything else.

However it is in the Cross, in the crucifixion of Jesus, in his willing acceptance of the worst that the world, the authorities, and particularly the religious authorities could do to him, that the true character of God is most clearly revealed. The irony of the Cross is a parable in itself. Here was God himself in human form, come to declare his deep and committed love for the human race, being tortured and cruelly executed by no less than the religious authorities of the people he had chosen one and a half millennia before. It is so ironic and yet Jesus keeps on loving. Despite all the failings of human religion, God still loves the human race.

And the Resurrection is the proof; proof that this extraordinary, revolutionary outpouring of divine love was not in vain, was not a fairy story, but is in fact the real purpose of the whole of creation. For God did not just reveal his love just once, it is his truth, his character, his essence, in all time and space. And when sentient beings anywhere learn to reflect that divine love, their lives, their world, God's universe, flowers and flourishes. Love is and was and always will be the real meaning of this universe.

And the world needs to hear this so badly, to have such faith in it that everything is transformed. So that the poor and oppressed are set free. So that those in power and authority learn that there is more joy in serving than in being served. So that all may learn to love and accept love without fear and the desire to control. So that all may find the will to change and challenge the unjust structures of society that are the product of human genes and not the love of God. So that those who are weighed down by their mistakes and their weakness and their sin, know that they

can find release. The world needs to hear that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the sign that all this is actually possible through faith in the love and grace of God.

Hope, faith, and love. The Resurrection of Jesus affirms, proclaims, shouts, that all this is wonderfully true, and dependable and worthy of human trust in God. But this vision needs us to live this truth first, in the life of this church, in our homes and families, in our daily lives; to live it and know it so deeply that it overflows into the world around us.

After his Resurrection Jesus tell his disciples to go back to Galilee, to the place of his ministry and their ministry together, the time of their pilgrimage together, to go back to the world they know, for that is where they will see and know their risen Lord. It is the same for us, to learn to recognise our risen Lord, not just in the spiritual celebrations of religious festivals, but in the ordinary stuff of life, where the hope of heaven, the true character of God, and the vision of his love and grace will sustain us.

Happy Easter!