

Easter Day Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – Sunday 12th April 2020

Acts 10.34-43; Colossians 3.1-4; Matthew 28.1-10

The message of Easter is one which very much needs to be heard at this dark time. It is not a goodtime message, but a message for tough times. We need today the message of Easter hope, that God is especially at work during life's dark times, bringing new life out of sadness and death. We need today the message of Easter comfort, that however bad things get, we remain held in God's love, come what may. We need today the Easter message of the friendship of Jesus, that however alone we may feel, he will never abandon us. And we need today the message of Easter faith and trust in God, that with the deep assurance that death is not the ultimate enemy.

The festival of Easter trumpets these messages loud and clear: there will be new life, we will remain held in God's unshakable love, we are not alone, and death is not so much to fear. Even if we die, even if a dearly loved one dies, in God's grace they are not lost; and one of the prizes of faith is to know this deeply in our beings, even while we live fulsomely.

Of course, what we are right to fear about death is loss; and loss is all around us at present like so much wreckage. We have lost our normal ways of life; we have lost our freedoms; we have lost our church buildings; we have lost the social fabric of our lives. Many fear the loss of livelihood, businesses and careers, and we fear the long march back to confidence and prosperity. And we fear losing dear friends and colleagues and family, especially if it is before their time.

And so grief is all around us, with all the complicated feelings of grief: disorientation, anger, guilt, resentment, self-pity, blame, anxiety, and so on. These are all too real, but they are also part of a vital survival dynamic. It's important to own these feelings honestly, and to keep them healthy; there is indeed a difference between healthy and unhealthy grief. It is important to give ourselves time, time to adjust to the new normality; and of course that is never as quick a process as we would like it to be. It is important to be gentle with one another and with ourselves, even as the feelings threaten to overwhelm us.

Easter speaks into all of this, and bids us to remain faithful and courageous and loving and hopeful; to look after the vulnerable and to support the front line, in the struggle to manage the virus pandemic; and not to let our lives be ruled by fear. God is faithful; there will be new life; and we shall meet again, in all sorts of ways. Life and love goes on, even if it is different. As the disciples in our Gospel reading for today, grappled with all their feelings, following the events of Good Friday, the very first thing that Jesus said to them, was "Do not be afraid".

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As Christians, we are called to live the resurrection life and to live it faithfully and courageously. This is not about having relentless optimism, or about denying all the difficult feelings. It's not about whistling in the dark. Rather it is about holding our fears and our losses, in the light and warmth of God's love, and in the light and warmth of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; and trusting that God can make something good and new out of them, even if it is not what we ourselves would have really wanted. It's about remembering that, come what may, we remain in God's love.

What does this look like? It means Christians are able to live less out of anxiety and more out of hope. It means that Christians are able to worry less about themselves and more about others. It means that Christians are able to see more of the potential in everyone they meet, rather than being discouraged and disappointed by the shortcomings of others and of ourselves. It means that Christians can sit lighter to the comforts of this life, and be more ready to make sacrifices for the future, for their families and communities and nations.

Of course none of this automatic or particularly easy. It is the narrow and rocky road of faith. Like any spiritual discipline, we need to work at it, because it is about training our somewhat wayward human nature. And we need, constantly, God's grace. And we need, constantly, the strength and inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. And these are indeed, constantly, available to us. That's God's loving promise to his children, both for this life and the next. And the proof is that when we faithfully take this way of faith, we find that God is faithful, and that we can trust him.

So what about the Easter hope in life beyond the empty tomb, in heaven? What about that, for our loved ones, for ourselves. In truth we really don't know much about it. What we do know is that it will be good, which is a relief. What we do know is that we will be closer to God, which will be awesome. What we do know is that we shall be together again in some way, which will be a real joy. Frankly, we can leave all the practicalities to God. For it is his show, it is not a consumer choice, and we can trust him, for he is faithful.

In the same way we do not quite know what the resurrection life will bring us now in this life either. But we do know, that as well as carrying the burdens of our sorrows, there will be many good things and many joys and much love, because God will be with us, until the end of time, because that is the Easter promise of our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

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