

Sunday 31st March 2013 Cathedral, Grahamstown 6 a.m. & 9.30 a.m.		Easter Day – Year C Renewal of Baptismal Vows
OT Vigil Isaiah 65:17-25	Ps 118:1-2, 14-24	Romans 6:3-11/Acts 10:34-43 John 20:1-18/Luke 24:1-12
The Resurrection of Christ		

“Full of fear, the women bowed down to the ground, as the men said to them, ‘Why are you looking among the dead for one who is alive? He is not here; he has been raised. Remember what he said to you while he was in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and three days later rise to life.’ ” (Luke 24:5-7)

Easter

It is wonderful to worship together here on Easter Day, as Christians all over the world are doing. We have walked with Jesus through the wilderness of the forty days of Lent. We followed the crowds on Palm Sunday. We were with the disciples as Jesus washed their feet. We stood at the cross as Jesus suffered and died. Now we go with the women to the tomb, and find it empty. A new day has dawned. Our world is turned upside down.

On Easter Day, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and his victory over sin and evil and death. All the powers of darkness, all the forces of evil, all the weight of sin, death itself, could not keep him in the grave. Through our baptism, we share in his risen life and in the power of his victory. We leave behind the old ways of sin; we embrace the way of Christ. We move from darkness to light. Our Easter liturgy summarises it: “By his death he has destroyed death, and by his rising again he has restored to us eternal life.”¹

The empty tomb

¹ *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, 136, # 12

Something wonderful happened on that first Easter Day.

When the women reached the tomb of Jesus, they found the stone rolled away. The tomb was empty. His body was not there. Instead, two men in shining robes affirmed that he had indeed been raised from the dead; and they reminded the women of what Jesus had said, “The Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and three days later rise to life.” (Luke 24:7)

Not surprisingly, it took a while for this to sink in. The women told the apostles, but the apostles thought they were talking nonsense, and would not believe them. But Peter went to the tomb, saw the linen wrappings, the shroud that in which the body of Jesus had been wrapped – and “went back home amazed at what had happened.” (Lk 24:12)

It’s important that we don’t make the same mistake as the apostles, and dismiss as nonsense the stories of the resurrection, and the appearances of Jesus. On another tack, people sometimes argue that the resurrection of Jesus was something the apostles invented. In spite of what Jesus had said to his disciples before his crucifixion, they were not expecting him to rise again. They could not have stolen the body of Jesus and then pretend that he had risen. They were a defeated, frightened group who had run away when their leader had been arrested and put on trial. Nor was the resurrection merely something that was going on in the heads of the disciples, something they wanted to believe – they were not expecting Jesus to rise, and were in no condition to fabricate it.

Instead, what happened was that the power of love, the power of God, the power of creation was focused and unleashed, resulting in new life and a new body, the Risen Christ emerging triumphant from the tomb.

Some while later, Peter, speaking of that first Easter Day, said, “They put Jesus to death by nailing him to a cross. But God raised him from

death three days later and caused him to appear...to us...” (Acts 10:39-40).

St Paul wrote, “I passed on to you what I received... that Christ died for our sins... that he was buried and that he was raised to life three days later.... That he appeared to Peter and then to all twelve apostles. Then he appeared to more than five hundred of his followers at once... then he appeared to James... Last of all he appeared also to me...” (1 Cor 15:3-9)

“For we know that Christ has been raised from death and will never die again – death will no longer rule over him.” (Rom 6:9)

The resurrection of Christ was central to the belief and preaching of the early church, and it remains central today. “He suffered ... was crucified, died, and was buried... On the third day he rose again...” (The Apostles Creed).

Resurrection today

But of course it does not stop there. We are not simply here to remember something that took place over 2000 years ago. We are here because “By our baptism... we were buried with [Jesus] and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life.” (Rom 6:4) We have received the new life of Christ at our baptism, and now, today.

The resurrection of Jesus is a sign of hope, the promise of new life, new beginnings, the “new heavens and a new earth” (Is 65:17) - even in the face of misery and despair and death.

The resurrection of Jesus is the promise of life after death, life in the face of death. The death we experience may literally be the death of a loved one – and we remember all those who have died in the last few weeks – the 13 SANDF soldiers who were killed in the CAR; Matt

Archer, in Grade 12 at St Andrew's College, who died tragically on Good Friday; others we know and love. The resurrection of Jesus holds for us all the promise of life beyond the grave.

The death we experience may be another kind of death: an experience of extreme suffering and horror. It may be a great disappointment. It may be the death of a dream. It may be a goodbye as our children leave home and town for greener pastures. It may be the wilderness, the desert that is our daily lives – desolation, despair, loneliness. It may be that the death we experience is the ruins of something we have built, a project we have poured our life into – and now it has been neglected or destroyed. The death of Andries Tatane, the Marikana killings, were not only the deaths of individuals. They were in some way the death of human rights, the death of freedom, the death of democracy. Here in Grahamstown our hopes for the future die a little bit more whenever there is another power failure, or the water is off again. But the resurrection of Christ means, as Rowan Williams put it, that there is an “open door... in the heart of every situation”² - because Jesus has risen from the dead.

Resurrection tells us of “the sheer toughness and persistence of God's love”³ - that Jesus is “still doing what he always did, making God present in his actual presence, his voice and touch”⁴ – and he does this through you and me, as we live in the power of the Risen Christ.

At Easter, as we renew our baptismal vows, we die to sin and rise again with Christ. And as people of the resurrection, we do not give up hope, we do not allow death and destruction and despair to have the last word. Instead, we continue in faith and trust, knowing and believing that the power of death and evil and sin has been broken, and that good will triumph and win the day in the end. May it be so for you and me, for us all.

² Williams, *Tokens of Trust*, 90

³ Williams, 91

⁴ Williams, 92

CONCLUSION

We come now to renew the promises made at our baptism.