

Sunday 16th April 2017 Cathedral, Grahamstown 9.30 a.m.		Easter Day – Year A Renewal of Baptismal Vows	
Acts 10:34-43	Ps 118:1-2, 14-24	Colossians 3:1-4	
		Matthew 28:1-10	
The Resurrection of Christ			

“The angel spoke to the women: ‘You have nothing to fear. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified... He has been raised.’ ”
(Matthew 28:5f)

Easter

It is wonderful to worship together here on Easter Day, together with Christians all over the world. Our prayers are especially with Christians living in fear or under persecution – Coptic Christians in Egypt; the church in Syria. Whether in light and joy, or darkness and sorrow, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and his victory over sin and evil and death. A new day has dawned. The revolution has begun. Our world is turned upside down.

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

Something wonderful happened on that first Easter Day.

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

In our Gospel reading this morning, we go with the two Marys as they approach the tomb. They are expecting to find his body. But what they do find is very different: an earthquake, an angel of the Lord, the stone rolled away, the empty tomb, and the guards falling down in terror.

They hear the words of the angel: “You have nothing to fear. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised, as he said he would be. Come and see the place where he was laid...” (Matt 28:6)

They leave the tomb “in awe and great joy”, and it is as they are on their way, that the risen Christ meets them and greets them, and sends them to take word to the disciples. Their lives are turned upside down. The revolution has begun.

Every year at Easter, it seems, various articles appear in the media examining and questioning the historicity of the resurrection. Did it really happen? Can it be proved beyond a shadow of doubt?

We rely very largely on what is called internal evidence – the Gospel witness; the New Testament writings, the record of the early church. As we saw in our NT readings (Acts and Colossians), the experience of, the belief in, the resurrection, was central. The earliest record that we have. Let’s look at what they say.

“All four Gospels in their canonical form contain appearance stories of the risen Christ. All tell of the discovery of the empty tomb.”²

The Gospel writers “clearly intended to write of something that had actually happened, something that had not only changed the women’s hearts, but had torn a hole in human history....”³

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

² Slovan, *John*. 219

³ Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*. Part Two. 199-200

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. There is no record of Christ's body being produced or found. Instead, the earliest traditions of the Christian church have the death and resurrection of Christ at their heart.

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 when Jesus died, something happened. The power of love, the power of God, the power of creation was unleashed. The Risen Christ emerging triumphant from the tomb. Our world has been turned upside down. The revolution has begun. You and I – we as the church, the body of Christ – *we* are the evidence for the resurrection.

What does this upside down, revolutionary world look like? What happens when the power and love of God is unleashed into our lives?

Three promises; three invitations; three opportunities.

1. The promise of life after death, life in the face of death. The death we experience may literally be the physical death of a loved one. The resurrection of Jesus holds for us all the promise of life after death. Death is the end of this life as we know it. But it is also the beginning of the perfect life with God beyond the grave.
2. The promise of eternal life. New life. Changed lives. We may be in our own places of death, our own graves of despair; our own tombs of sin; we may be looking at our own lives, all too aware of brokenness and shame and failure. Death. God

invites us to new life. Resurrection life. New beginnings. Calling us out of our graves, our places of death, our sin, into life.

3. The promise of hope, in the face of suffering, disappointment, disillusionment – the deaths that we face and experience. It may be the death of a dream. It may be a sad goodbye; the death may be seeing something we have built, a project we have poured our life into, being neglected or destroyed. The resurrection of Christ promises us hope.

Each of these promises carries with it an invitation, an opportunity, and a challenge: the invitation to respond, to put our faith and trust in God; the opportunity to make a difference, to be part of God's revolution that turns the whole world upside down, starting with our own lives; the challenge to allow God to bump us out of our complacency; to repent and turn back to the Lord; to rededicate ourselves to lives of worship and witness and service – and especially now, today, at this time.

Easter 2017 comes in the midst of tumult and terror. We grieve with all who were killed, or injured, in the bomb attacks on Coptic Christians in Egypt, on Palm Sunday (a week ago). The suffering and civil war in Syria continues to escalate, with the gas attack on civilians, and the missile strike by the United States. In our own land, we face economic and political crisis following the cabinet reshuffle on March 31st this year, junk status, state capture, corruption and greed at the highest levels of our land. Unemployment is at 27%. We are heading for dark days, unless there is political change of leadership, and a change of heart by those in authority.

Faith leaders across our land have joined to call for President Zuma to step down. This is not an attack on the ANC, or the parliamentary and democratic process. Rather, the church and other faith communities are speaking truth to power: that corrupt governance will destroy our democracy. As you know, the Cathedral held a Vigil for our country,

a week back; we continue to pray earnestly for our land, particularly with the vote of no confidence. I hope that it is a secret ballot so that all Members of Parliament are allowed to vote according to their conscience. The future of our country is on the line.

A prayer by Bishop Geoff Quinlan:

A Prayer for our Country

Lord, grant us a vision for our land; a land of justice, where none shall prey on others; a land of plenty, where poverty shall cease to fester; a land of work, where all can be employed, a land of openness, where all are accepted as equal; a land of healing, where hatred and racial prejudice exist no more; a land of peace which is free of violence; and bring this vision to fruition; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

You and me? Let us be resurrection people. Let us be open to the Spirit of God. Let us be part of the revolution.

CONCLUSION

As people of the resurrection, we do not give up hope, we do not allow death 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.

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April 2017