

5 April Easter Day

Light and Life to All He Brings

Acts 10.34-43, Hymn to the Risen Christ (p.6), Colossians 3.1-4, Matthew 28.1-10.

Our reading from Acts tells of Peter bringing new life to others. It follows the account of an angel telling Cornelius to send for Peter. Peter is given the vision of things to eat and told not to call unclean what God has made clean. The Holy Spirit then tells Peter to go with the men sent for him by Cornelius. Peter goes into a house that is full of people who are not like him. Cornelius is a centurion in the Italian regiment, and his house is filled with his family and friends.

This is why Peter says, "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism", and he continues to tell these people all about Jesus. His realisation is that neither he nor those like him are God's favourites to the exclusion of others.

God has given me a few lessons in life, enabling me to see that some of my well-meant assumptions are not necessarily God's full story and God's full intention for me and for others. I ask you to consider whether God has ever caused you to question your assumptions about your life of faith? I won't ask for examples, as some of these will be deeply personal, but just a yes or no. Has God ever called on you to question at least one and maybe more of your assumptions, particularly about other people? [...]

It is not a coincidence that, following Jesus' death and resurrection, his disciples leave their comfort zone and take the good news out into the world, even though the world is a very different place from the one to which they were accustomed. Peter says, "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

"I now realise!" Do we have the humility to admit to ourselves and to others that God's vision is so much bigger than ours and that we are continually having our eyes opened to more and more of God's intention and power? We are used to reading of Paul preaching to the Gentiles, but here is Peter doing the same.

There's more. God accepts from every nation the one who fears him. Fearing God is to love God with all your being. And, God accepts from every nation the

one who does what is right, that is, to love your neighbour as yourself. Do the right thing in your heart and faith, and do the right thing for others.

We hear further that they are commanded to preach to the people and to testify that Jesus is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. The living and the dead! I think that is just about everyone! There's more! All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

There are many ways of exploring, understanding and relating to the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the early church, they tended to regard the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus as a single event in three parts. Some accounts in scripture give more separation and detail, while others gloss from one to the other without so much separation in time and understanding. Today we particularly celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. There are also many ways to celebrate this amazing event. The Hymn to the Risen Christ celebrates Jesus' victory over sin and death. Sin and death have no more power, not over Jesus and not over you or over me. We are human, and we have a limited human lifespan but that is no longer the whole story. That is no longer the end. As the Hymn to the Risen Christ says, "For as in Adam all die: even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Resurrection is a now and evermore event. We can lead resurrection lives now and look for even more.

The letter to the Colossians says, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." That has consequences for the world and for us and how we live in the world. We are not destined for death but for glory!

For this, Christ was born. For this, he died. For this, he rose again. For this, he ascended in glory to the Father. The cross and the resurrection remind us that endings can also be new beginnings.

As we often find with God, mighty things are often seen through the simple, the real, the concrete, the small things of daily life.

The resurrection was not initially all shocked awe and wonder. Instead, there was an empty space, a big rock in a different place, a bare tomb. It looked like loss and abandonment. And yet there was also glory and wonder. There were angels and good news, a tale to tell others, a story to share with his disciples,

and his family, and his friends, and ultimately with the whole world. This is the story that we can share with others, and with the world.

Let me finish with a verse from a Christmas carol, for without the incarnation, that humble birth into a world in need, there would be no Messiah, no beloved teacher, no miracles and teachings, no crucifixion, no resurrection and no recognition of all that our Lord Jesus Christ was and is and continues to be for us and for all humankind forever and ever.

*Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us from the earth,
Born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing.
Glory to the newborn [and newly risen] King. Amen.*