

Easter Day, Salisbury Cathedral 10.30am 30th March 2013

Acts 10.34-43; Luke 24.1-12

Early in the morning they came to the tomb. The women who had come with him from Galilee, and who had seen where his body had been laid, came back on the first day of the new week with the spices they had prepared for his body. On finding the grave empty and beginning to encounter the resurrection, the Gospels say they were afraid and terrified. After telling the disciples what sounded an idle tale, Peter ran to the tomb to see what had happened. There is urgency, fear and disorientation in the Gospel stories of the resurrection.

What quickly began to emerge is a joyful account of the resurrection of Jesus and a faith which emphasised love and truth, forgiveness and life in all its fullness through the life, death and resurrection of the God man Jesus, in whom time and eternity met. Christianity went out into the world to become the largest of the world's religions, now with just over 2 billion people.

The strength of Christianity is not just its missionary imperative but its adaptability. In different times and places, Christianity has taken root in very different cultures. This is the nature of a faith based on God with us in human form, God incarnate. So we are used to seeing artistic representations of Christ looking White European, Chinese, South Asian, African and South American as well as the Semite he was. In picturing Christ in these ways, no one says this is a 'category error'. These expressions of Christ in every different culture point to a deeper truth: that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Christ redeems the whole of humanity.

In the last two weeks we have welcomed a new Pope, Francis, and a new Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin. Their emphasis on service and humility is striking and refreshing. They recognise the Church today has damage to repair. No matter what it looks like on large church occasions, it is not convincing in our day to proclaim the authority of institution and hierarchy.

Standing inside the door of Canterbury Cathedral, in dialogue with a young girl, Archbishop Justin declared,

"I am sent as Archbishop to serve you, to proclaim the love of Christ and with you to worship and love him with heart and soul, mind and strength."

Our new Archbishop, Eton and Cambridge, successful in business, said,

"I come knowing nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified, and in weakness and fear and in much trembling."

We recognise the authority of that, and of a Pope who declines to live in the grand apartment and chooses simpler rooms and on Maundy Thursday washed the feet of prisoners.

The community of the resurrection is made up of disciples who ran away and are gathered again at Easter not because they were virtuous but because God loves them and calls them. It is the same for us. In this Christian community sacrificial love is poured out on even the undeserving simply because we are human and God loves us. We are made in the image of God, and are treated with dignity and respect not because we have earned it but because that is how we treat all people.

Belief in life eternal means we also believe in life before death. In the peace of Christ we are called to love our neighbours as ourselves, even our enemies, even the undeserving. This character of Christianity, with its reverence for life and respect for the vulnerable, has had a profound effect. For Christians there is a presumption in favour of life which shows in our commitment to the poor, of children and in the care of the sick and dying.

This year the cathedral ran a Lent course on the economy. In this country the gap between richest and poorest has widened over the last 30 years yet research that shows the happiest societies are those where the gap between richest and poorest are least. You can see why the bishops have been expressing concern about the impact of welfare reform on the poorest, especially children, the elderly and disabled.

It's often said that Christians show more interest in the distribution of wealth than in the creation of wealth but historically Christians has been good at wealth creation. How we make wealth s is at least as much a matter of faith as how it is distributed. Roman Catholic social teaching emphasises charity (meaning love) and truth, justice and the common good as principles in the creation of real wealth of lasting value. That is language not much used in the world's financial houses.

The stories we have been re-telling this last Holy Week, of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, are in their way stories of everyman and woman. We can all identify with the various characters: the disciples who let their Lord down and ran away, Peter who denied he knew him, Judas who betrayed him; Pilate with his civic responsibilities washing his hands and asking, "What is truth?"; Caiaphas the High Priest and the religious leaders who whipped up the crowd, the good thief on the cross who said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" and Christ on the cross saying, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing". There were the sorrowful women of Jerusalem and the women who came with him from Galilee and who, unlike the male disciples, followed to the tomb.

These stories teach us about sacrificial love and forgiveness and the possibility that life can get going again even when it has gone terribly wrong. In these ways the stories of Jesus are an inspiring moral tale in which we will find our place and in which the resurrection breathes new life.

There are a lot of people who say they find Christian belief difficult but who still value the ability of the Church to make a community based on good and *almost* universal values. But the fear and terror of the women when they first encountered the resurrection says this is much more than a moral tale to encourage our good behaviour.

In the cross resurrection of Jesus we see what Archbishop Desmond Tutu was able to affirm from his own experience of an oppressed people, that:

Goodness is stronger than evil;
Love is stronger than hate;
Light is stronger than darkness;
Life is stronger than death;
Victory is ours through Him who loves us.

Desmond Tutu, [An African Prayer Book](#), Hodder and Stoughton 1995

If we value the morality we should also value the religious beliefs based on events that changed the world.

On the first day of a new week the world changes because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. There is a new creation. God is with us; and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we have seen his glory, the glory of a Father's only son, full of grace and truth to whom be glory now and for ever.

Amen