

Easter Day 2017

In 1810 ETA Hoffman wrote a review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, he wrote:

Beethoven's instrumental music unveils before us the realm of the mighty and the immeasurable. Here shining rays of light shoot through the darkness of night, and we become aware of giant shadows swaying back and forth, moving ever closer around us and destroying within us all feeling but the pain of infinite yearning, in which every desire, leaping up in sounds of exultation, sinks back and disappears. . . .

This is indeed criticism in a new key. Music is being accorded powers at once transcendent and transformative: it hovers far above the ordinary world, yet it also reaches down and alters the course of human events. Beethoven has been the composer of the march of time: from the revolutions of 1848 and 1849, when performances of the symphonies became associated with the longing for liberty; to the Second World War, when the opening notes of the Fifth were linked to the short-short-short-long Morse code for "V," as in "victory"; and 1989, when Leonard Bernstein conducted the Ninth near the fallen Berlin Wall. His music has been described as the pinnacle of western civilization. I have listened to the symphonies this week, seeking inspiration. Seeking inspiration in music written by a rude, crude man, crippled by deafness and paranoia, he was irrational, suicidal and increasingly turning to the bottle and brilliant.

Most of us do not want to be thought of as rude, crude, irrational etc. we would much rather be thought of as rational, sensible, logical, moderate folk. It's a very Anglican thing! But I do sometimes wonder if we try too hard. As many of you know when the ANU held a public lecture recently on Christianity and science I felt moved to say something. But I felt that I had to be rational, after all, I said to myself, these are scientific people, mathematicians, physicists and the like, they won't have any old truck with my ramblings. But with an attitude like that Beethoven would never have written nine symphonies, Michelangelo wouldn't have bothered to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Shakespeare and Tolstoy would never have put pen to paper. The trouble is with that an attitude like mine I would have missed the resurrection altogether; unlike Mary Magdalene who went to tomb, as one writer called it on a 'pointless journey.' *But she went.* She went despite the fact that it was sealed, despite the fact that it was heavily guarded. If Mary Magdalene had thought carefully and rationally about what she was doing there were countless good reasons for not doing it!

She was not being rational and it is salutary for us to reflect on this, we who love to be rational, sensible. If she had been rational she would have missed the resurrection. She was driven by what.... an irresistible impulse...faith...who knows, but she went. We (I) spend far too much time being rational, balanced, making sense of everything, not leaving enough room for impulse... emotion... faith...intuition.... imagination.

Mary then became the first missionary of the resurrection. She didn't keep it to herself, but went off to Peter and John with the news. What we learn from that is our faith calls us to respond, despite the risks and the likelihood of ridicule. This encounter with Jesus for Mary, for us, will change us. If we allow it, if we have faith, a faith borne out of our deepest impulses, and emotions. Look at what the resurrection encounter did for the followers of Jesus. A mob huddled in the upper room, fear, paranoia, angry, confused. They became fearless, powerful witnesses prepared to face great danger, let alone mockery, in the name of the risen Lord. They went through a transformation of hope.

The resurrection is now. If we allow it to break through our all too rational way of thinking, if we allow it to break through the pessimism and cynicism that we have over the problems of the world, over our own problems. The resurrection summons us to a new energy of hope both for us and for creation.

History has shown time and time again what hope can do in the face of our far too rational intellectual, often pessimistic approach. Christ breaks the power of the past; the resurrection stands for the great fact of Christian experience that the past need not control the future. Remember Paul the murderer becomes the greatest apostle, Peter the deserter becomes the rock on which the church was built. And Mary a mixed up past indeed; her faith caused her to want to offer devotion to her Lord even though she could not get to him, or see him, quite a lesson for us, what a wonderful reward she won.

This devotion by these people was achieved because they spent time with Jesus, before and after his resurrection, yes-even Paul. Another great lesson for us who are always too busy, too preoccupied, too distracted. As well as our rational selves, too weak in faith, our stony hearts hold us back. But Jesus says never mind the stone is rolled away, the curtain has been torn in two, yes its dark in there....but allow your eyes to adjust and you can find me.

The principle feeling at this time must be joy. Uncomplicated joy at the death of Jesus. I hope that you have left your brains behind this morning, because they only mess things up, I know. A Russian poet hounded to death by Stalin In 1938, Osip Mandlestam wrote: 'Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christian life is joyous. We do not have to redeem the world: it has been achieved. What is left? The blissful responsibility to enjoy the world.'

'Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of them that slept.' What is left? The blissful responsibility to enjoy the world.

A happy Easter to you all! Christ is risen...he is risen indeed!