

Easter Vigil 2021

What happened yesterday? Our Orthodox friends would have some definite things to say. We Anglicans are a little more reticent. When it comes to Holy Saturday we tend to think of Brasso, vacuum cleaners and the like. But late yesterday afternoon we gathered here to help us appreciate and enter into the day. At the time I said that it was neither a concert nor a recital, it wasn't an act of worship, it was neither a prayer meeting nor a liturgy. It was in fact all of them to some degree. But what was the point of it? If it was not to entertain, if it was not to worship, if it were not to educate (it was all those things too); what was the point of it, what was it for? What it was for was simply to stop time. To put us in a situation where time was irrelevant. We don't do that in our lives, we are far too busy; there are so many things to be done. But as dawn breaks upon us this morning we are reminded in the ancient words of this liturgy that in the resurrection of Christ the new creation is spliced into the old, eternity is grafted onto time.

How many of the issues that we face concern what might happen in time, or what already has happened in time? We either live in the past or the future. Yesterday in that brief 50 minutes or so we were given the opportunity to live in the present. Holy Saturday is all about that, it is at once both the day when nothing happens and yet everything happens, time and eternity collide. During that day the work of grafting our lives in time, into eternity happens, if we will allow it to be. That's what it was for.

Because the Easter faith is not just recalling an event which occurred in the past. Easter faith affirms the continuing presence of the living Christ among us, now. Resurrection is not an event in history, it is a way of living, it transcends time and place. Over this past week we have been re-enacting the last days of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. But re-enactment is not the right word. When Colin played Beethoven yesterday, when Douglas and Janene performed Bach it wasn't a re-enactment. We didn't say Colin will now re-enact Beethoven's Tempest Sonata. What Colin and Douglas and Janene did for us was make Bach and Beethoven present for us in that moment. They interpreted these great composers that we might be immersed in their work. This is what we have been doing over this past week. Through music, drama, liturgy, movement and colour, through sacrament we have been participating. Immersing ourselves in events that occurred two thousand years ago but importantly are played out in our lives and the life of our world day in, day in out: service, betrayal, self-giving, abuse of power, forgiveness, violence, sorrow, regret, death and now resurrection joy.

But it isn't easy, this participation. I find it very disquieting to wash people's feet, and immerse myself in the events of Good Friday. But through it all we are reminded as Jesus tells us, "If you want to keep experiencing me, love

one another. Forgive one another." Thus we meet the risen Christ in the life of forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, justice, love. Where love and charity abound, there God is, there Christ is. It's not enough to proclaim resurrection, it's not enough to re-enact it, we need to embody it.

As Rowan Williams explains: 'the believer's *life* is a testimony to the risen-ness of Jesus: he or she demonstrates that Jesus is not dead by living a life in which Jesus is the never-failing source of affirmation, challenge, enrichment and enlargement.'

'The Book of Acts tells us the first believers made their common life a "laboratory of the resurrection" not just a theological mystery but a daily practice, rejecting the economics of selfishness and scarcity for radical acts of generosity and compassion. Their belief was a practice of entrusting themselves to the renewing force of divine love that is never exhausted by the sufferings of the world.'

These are bold claims. But the resurrection's greatest challenge is not that we are being asked to *believe* something difficult; it is that we are being asked to *do* something difficult, in the words of one of the early Desert Fathers we are called to be:

*to be utterly transformed by immersion into the dying-and-rising of Christ,
to become my baptismal self,
to cast off the rags of ego and fear
and be clothed in "garments of indescribable light."*

So what prevents us? From engaging, participating fully? I don't think it's a matter of intellect or trust or some other nagging doubts. It's a question of whether we believe we are up for it! Well I can say that in the grace of the Christ we are, because.....

he is risen,
he is risen indeed!