

EASTER DAY

Sunday 17th April 2022 – written by Bishop Donald Kirk

‘Alleluia!’ is the definitive Easter word. In the Church’s liturgical tradition, we say alleluia repeatedly throughout the Easter Season. It is a transliteration of the Hebrew and means ‘Praise the Lord!’ Exactly the right sentiment for Easter Day – Praise the Lord for his Salvation won for us by his life, death and resurrection!

We sing our hymns of praise echoing this. Words like this 14th century hymn:

*Jesus Christ is risen today, alleluia!
our triumphant holy days, alleluia!
who so lately on the cross, alleluia!
suffered to redeem our loss, alleluia!*

At dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene makes her way to the tomb and finds it empty. She has gone to do the right thing, “*taking the spices that they had prepared*” [Luke 24.1] but was shocked to find “*the stone had been removed from the tomb.*” [John 20.1]

Our familiarity with this story means that it is hard to register in our minds the utter shock this would have given Mary. Jesus had been her teacher and also her dear friend. The sense of invasion into something personal would have been like coming home and finding your house ransacked and everything of value stolen. It is little wonder that she runs to Peter for help.

The empty tomb is the first sign of resurrection but not enough to convince them of its reality. Luke tells us, “*Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*” [Luke 24.12] As yet they have not realised what has happened and so they wonder.

Both Luke and John speak of two angels who are present and speak of Jesus’ resurrection:

- “*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.*” [Luke 24.5] These words are spoken to the women who went to the tomb.
- In John they speak to Mary and simply ask “*Woman, why are you weeping?*” [John 20.13] causing her to turn around and see the risen Jesus.

The extra narrative in John gives us Mary Magdalene’s personal encounter with the risen Christ. It is a delightful moment when she confuses him with a gardener. But this is hardly surprising because her logical mind is telling her he is dead – she saw him die

– and she is in distress at his missing body. So, her question is rather like saying ‘with all the horrible things they have done already, what have they done to him now?’

Jesus’ response to her distress is to simply call her by name, and in that moment, she heard a familiar voice overcoming her logic and distress with compassion and care. This is how she recognises the resurrection.

We cannot stand in the garden outside the empty tomb as Mary, Peter and the other disciples did, and even if we could that would not convince us of the truth of resurrection. We have the eyewitness accounts of these Apostles recorded for us in the Gospels and we have secular history’s record of Jesus’ earthly life and the faith of the earliest Christians.

At our Baptism we are made:

- Members of the Body of Christ – we participate in the life of the Church which is Christ’s Body on earth sharing his love for us and all people.
- Children of the one heavenly Father – we recognise that we belong to God and his loving protection nourishes and nurtures our lives.
- Inheritors of the kingdom of God – we share in the promise of resurrection, the promise of life eternal, the promise given by today’s celebration.

In our Baptism we are named before God, and it is in that name that God knows us. Just as Mary was called by name when Jesus spoke to her so, too, he calls us by name and welcomes us into his family both here on earth and in heaven.

When Jesus rose from the dead, Mary was first to proclaim this truth, and the Apostles followed. The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles reveal how it took some time for many of the faithful followers of Jesus to realise this truth. The same is so for us. We cannot full comprehend what resurrection means until that day when we see Jesus face to face. We can offer our trust and faith in the reality of resurrection and experience Jesus presence with us as we worship and pray looking forward to that day when with all the company of heaven we can sing:

*Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord,
alleluia, alleluia, give praise to his name.*