

Revd. Simon Lewis

Sunday 18 April

Theme: Easter 3

Isolation Radio Talk

The Cross was the hiding place of the power of God

Good Morning

I am hopeful; I rejoice greatly; I speak to you overshadowed by the empty Cross.

This is the most gloriously holy time of the year for any Christian. It was not always like this, nor was it glorious; for the road we have travelled goes to the other side of the empty Cross, to another time. I put the metaphor in reverse; the road which winds across the plateau from Bethpage to Jerusalem - down the steep side of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley and up into Jerusalem itself, is a road which has extended itself far beyond that short journey on the day Jesus Christ made his grand entry into the Holy City.

Th winding road extended then into a religious and political confrontation; it included betrayal, trial, and execution - an execution as of a common criminal, on the stinking rubbish dump downwind from the city; the death of the man once hailed as King of the Jews. The road went even further because, so it was claimed, that same Jesus, did not remain sealed in the tomb; he rose from the dead.

From that day to this, women and men have spoken of that day as the day on which the history of the world was turned completely in a new direction. From a small acorn a mighty oak tree grows; from the small number of defeated followers of Jesus, there grew a mighty Faith; it spread like wildfire through the centuries that followed. Wherever you stand in relation the Christian Faith and to the Cross of Christ, that cannot be denied.

I am privileged to share my Christian faith on Isolation Station. I am not ashamed of it, nor do I make any secret that it is, for me, the one thing which makes real sense of what often seems a very senseless world. I am ashamed that the faith is often divisive; the cause of bitterness; that it is so, belongs in human nature, not in the Christian faith. I am deeply ashamed of Christians who cannot worship with each other; who sit in judgement on the faith of others.

Let me share with you then, what I believe to be at the heart of the Christian Faith, and why this time of the year is so, so important for Christians.

The impulse which fired the whole Christian movement was an extraordinary story; it seemed to have no common sense attached to it; Jesus Christ, publicly executed and hastily buried, was alive and had been seen and spoken with. The whole event was so sudden that even his family and followers, who were close by, were totally unprepared. Their morale had been shattered; their hopes turned to dust. Afterwards they recalled their state of mind as being akin to death. Then, the next thing we know, is that they are like the new-born; born into a living hope by bewildering

experiences. Such was their effect that they felt compelled to tell others, first in a whisper; then in the shout - Jesus is alive.

That is the victorious message of the Christian faith - but beware - be very, very careful. I have warned you before that some would have you bounce from the excitement of Palm Sunday to the excitement of Easter Day. This cannot be; it flies in the face of what the life and teaching of Jesus was about. It is the great truth you cannot avoid; there can be no Easter experience if there is no Good Friday before it. The rejoicing of Easter must always take account of Good Friday - it must speak, as it did for earliest Christians, that the Creator - the Lord of heaven and earth - is uniquely associated with the weakness and nakedness, the vulnerability of the suffering figure on the Cross.

This is probably a very inadequate way of stating the case - I have neither the time nor the skill to argue it further this morning. In any event, the truth must be lived as well as stated and I am content to let Martin Luther speak for me across four centuries when he said the Cross was the hiding place of the power of God. It seems to me that the paradox it contains is both the great glory, but also the greatest difficulty of Christian belief today.

This is particularly so in a society and a community which seems to place great value and worth on worldly success, where a person is measured by the size of the bank balance or the length of the list of achievements.

Good Friday, long before the exultation of Easter, tells me that when you speak of God you must not forget the one lost sheep, the one human being in despair, sorrow, oppression or agony or grief. You must never forget the tears of one starving child.

If I may not sweep them under the moral carpet, likewise, I can never think they are part of God's plan and design - beware those who tell you so. These things have to be reconciled, those situations, those people must be healed and saved if God is truly God of a suffering world. The uniqueness of the Christian faith is that God is *not* removed from our humanity; God is in the very mess of it. God knows its suffering; Good Friday tells you that. The Divine Crown is a crown of thorns.

There are some who will be anxious to impose a great burden of belief. They are determined that none shall escape. I want to assure you that Christians who most fully 'enter into the joy of their Lord', are those whose faith is a Cross as well as Resurrection; theirs is not the dull demand of duty.

When a Christian condemns it is what our Lord condemned - hypocrisy, calculated worldliness, and offences against the law of love. A Christian is as likely to be tempted by any of those as anyone else; they understand, too well, it is those things that nailed him to the Cross on Good Friday. They hold him there, still; but the open secret of the Christian Faith is that they do not have the last word.

Christ is Risen, Alleluia.

Thank you for listening

Prayer

Let us pray to the one God, Creator, Word and Spirit,
that our lives may bear witness to our hope,
in Christ the risen. Amen.