

Revd. Simon Lewis

Sunday 11 April

Theme: Easter 2

## Isolation Radio Talk

### Serenity and acceptance: the prelude of an enduring impact on history

Good Morning

In the long, difficult period of the lockdown I think television watching increased; it was among many blessings as the storm of COVID-19 raged. It is possibly true that the more you watch, the more jaundiced you become. Where do you find yourself? In someone's kitchen cooking food you wouldn't want to eat: doing unspeakable things to the neighbour's garden: or unprintable things to the house next door. For drama, or indeed News, you are either in the police station or in hospital. Devoted followers of *Causality*, *Holby City*, *A&E*, to name but seven, will know the difference between resuscitation and resurrection. In one life resumes, in the other, relationships are restored.

On Easter Day with Christians the world over you discovered what the disciples discovered; that death does not put an end to Jesus. On that day you did not look for explanation; you did not celebrate his survival; now, a week later, you find new ways to speak about Resurrection.

Resurrection does not mean returning to the previous existence; no, you enter a new one. Resurrection confronts issues of life and death; you do only die once. (Pity poor Lazarus then: he was brought from the grave only, I guess, to die again; his family grieve for him again.) Resurrection also confronts issues of time and space; the resurrected Jesus appears in all sorts of places, so Scripture tells you.

This is what Easter Day blazed out into the entire world; this is the risen Christ spoken about and believed in. To believe Christ is risen from the dead you will dare also to believe in God who tells of hope and joy and glory, even in the face of utter despair and darkness. No wonder the Christian Faith began as a faith for 'slaves and women'. The philosopher Nietzsche thought that an insult; you take it as a complement.

I do not think we 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians really understand just what an *ordinary event* Jesus dying was. Here was a ragged country rabbi, in a very unimportant province of the Roman Empire, who upset the authorities, who was put to death as a show of power, in a ghastly, but very common way. No great deal here. The Greek Statesman Cicero, a century before had written, that 'crucifixion was a fate so low that no well-bred person should ever mention it'.

It seems clear, God took a risk; let me try to explain. One of the small but compelling incidents of all those making up the events leading to the death of Jesus, and then to that glorious burst of energy on the Day of Resurrection, is in the Garden of Gethsemane; Jesus went there with his Disciples after the supper on what we have come to call Maundy Thursday. It seems strange to return so soon to that moment when now you feel you should be saying 'Alleluia'. I hope it becomes clear.

Remember the incident? Jesus goes on a little way from his Disciples. They fall asleep around him; he is alone with his uncertainties. Which way to go; what should he do; drink the cup of suffering or try to escape from it? Should he confront the reality of what was happening; should he try to avoid it? He wrestled with this. As the events turned out you will not deny that Jesus' surrender to his destiny has liberated and empowered millions upon millions of people down the ages; it leads you to say that Jesus is alive, today, now.

One of the often-missed phrases in the drama comes when Jesus tells his disciples to put down their arms when he is arrested. To those come to take him he says. 'This is your hour' (Luke 22.53). Jesus accepts; there is no more to be done; there is nothing he can do.

Such a moment of acceptance may come to you; you need honesty and courage to face it. Life does bring sudden challenges; lovers turn away from you; society discards you; you are no longer needed; your own body betrays you; the aches and pains of age catch up with you; one day life will end; you must die. There is no escape. For Jesus there is no secret passage out of the Garden of Gethsemane; there is no regiment of angels sweeping to rescue; here, is only one harsh fact. The betrayer is at hand. So long ago, and still we look for meaning with hope in our hearts.

When the betrayer kisses you, you recoil from reality; this death; this loss. The inner voice says this should not happen; you did not deserve this, this suffering, this pain, this loss of well-being; this hopelessness. God should do something about it you protest; but things you do not ask for or want *do* happen. Judas constantly brings the police into the garden of your life to arrest you. You cannot pretend; the betrayer will not leave you. Desperately you fill the void and calm your fears; yet all must be faced in the real world.

There is a fantasy; there is denial in the Christian faith, no doubt. At the centre is the prophet of Nazareth saying his yes to the thing *he* wanted to escape from. His surrender led to the surprise, so transforming that the Christians still have difficulty in describing it. Perhaps the commonest way is to slip into pastoral, horticultural metaphor - the rebirth of spring after the death of winter. Nevertheless, you live with the *cloud of unknowing*; flood, drought, disease can turn a lovely pastoral image to ashes.

To think about Resurrection may lead you to surprising, deeper understanding. The Resurrection mystery may say something about the inescapability of much that confronts you. Some things are inevitable and you compound misery by denying them. For Jesus of Nazareth, who said his yes to his own betrayal and death, the testimony of history, is that his serenity, his acceptance, was the prelude of an enduring impact on history that continues in your heart and in your mind still, after 2000 years.

Theologian and pastor in the last century, Reinhold Niebuhr, captured something of this in a prayer;

God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed;  
courage to change the things that should be changed;  
and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

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.

God,  
give me grace  
    to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed;  
    courage  
        to change the things that should be changed;  
        and the wisdom  
            to distinguish the one from the other.  
Amen.