

Reflections for Easter Day

Revd Andrew Kellett

Finale (Andante) from Sonata No 6 in D minor – Felix Mendelssohn.

CHRIST IS RISEN – HE IS RISEN INDEED

This is the traditional greeting on Easter Sunday morning, particularly in the Orthodox Churches.

In 1930 in the Soviet Union, Christianity was outlawed, Christians were being persecuted and churches had been closed. The Soviet leader, Bukharin, was addressing a huge rally in Kiev on the subject of atheism with an outspoken attack on Christianity. He spoke for an hour then asked if there were any questions. There was a deafening silence. Then one man plucked up the courage to go onto the platform, he just shouted: “Christ is risen”. There was a deafening roar from the massive crowd: “He is risen indeed”.

Today our churches are closed and we are not allowed to meet together; Easter as a festival is not happening but it doesn't change the fact that Jesus is alive.

The readings are taken from the Book of Common Prayer

The Easter Anthems:

Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:
therefore let us keep the feast;
Not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness:
but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. *1 Cor. 5. 7.*

Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more:
death hath no more dominion over him.
For in that he died, he died unto sin once:
but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.
Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin:
but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Rom. 6. 9.*

Christ is risen from the dead:
and become the first-fruits of them that slept.
For since by man came death:
by man came also the resurrection of the dead.
For as in Adam all die:
even so in Christ shall all be made alive. *1 Cor. 15. 20.*

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son:
and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be:
world without end. Amen.

The Collect

Almighty God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech thee, that as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Epistle is taken from the third chapter of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

The Gospel is taken from the twentieth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John:

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalen early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together; and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre; and he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie; and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

Reflection

Put yourself in the shoes of his mother Mary and of the disciples and friends of Jesus. Within 24 hours everything had changed for them. The bottom had dropped out of their world. All their hopes had come to nothing, their friend and master was gone. They couldn't even bury Jesus themselves, a few of them watched strangers do it at a distance. On that Sunday morning they were shocked and grieving.

Everything has changed for us too. As I write, the death toll from Covid-19 has almost reached 9,000. Most have been unable to see their loved ones as they were dying and cannot give them a proper funeral. People have lost their jobs, others won't be back to school or work for months. There are feelings of grief and loss everywhere. We can't see our family and friends and plans are on hold.

Two friends of Jesus trudged along the road that Sunday evening, perhaps they just needed to get out of the house and talk together about the shocking events of the last 24 hours. (today they would have had to be from the same household or shouting across a 2m gap!) As they talked a stranger came up alongside them and joined in the conversation. As we find out eventually in Luke's account of what happened in Luke 24:13–35 that stranger was Jesus, but they didn't recognise him. Jesus comes alongside us now and he is happy to talk. He wants us to talk about our disappointments and frustrations, he will gently direct our thinking and give us some hope.

When they arrived at a house and shared a simple meal with the stranger they recognised Jesus by the nail marks in his hands as he broke the bread. He fully understands and shares all our griefs, but most of all he defeated death and the fear of death. Only a suffering God can be fully with us in our suffering.

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Prayers

Risen Christ, you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope; strengthen us to proclaim your risen life and fill us with your peace, to the glory of God the Father. Amen

Of course we'll pray particularly for those we know who have been bereaved and those who are fearful; for Julia Birkett and Joseph Bilal and their families; and for all those on the front line in the NHS and as carers. In the name of Jesus Christ our risen Lord. Amen.

An Easter Alleluya – Gordon Slater