

## **Easter Day 2006**

### **“Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Colossian 3:3**

Today is the first day of the rest of your life. How often have we heard that cliché, a phrase which people use as a pick-me-up, an encouragement to look forward not back, and to make the most of all the opportunities which life affords us? Today is the first day of the rest of your life. That is obviously, and rather mundanely true, but today it also isn't quite good enough, because today, Easter Day, is not the first day of the rest of our lives so much as the first day of our lives altogether. True life began that first Easter morning and begins anew every year on this, the day above all days. If Christmas Day is Jesus' birthday, then Easter Day is ours, because the new life to which we are re-born in Christ was itself born into the world at Easter.

Strangely, however, Easter invites us to celebrate not a birth, but a death. The solemnity of the past week, and the effort and energy which has gone into observing it with appropriate gravity, has left us in no doubt that the death of Christ is something without which there would be no Christianity, no week called Holy, and no Church to re-enact that week. Our new life begins in death: only the love of God is truly creative, only the love of God can bring true life where there was none, and that love which has been poured into our hearts was first poured out on that Friday and on that cross. The reason we are about to re-affirm our baptismal promises is not simply that we should remind ourselves of the new life of Easter. Rather than jog our memories, what God asks us to do is to re-consecrate our lives in the life of Christ, and we can only do that because, in baptism, we have died to sin first, before being raised to life in Christ. Whatever one thinks about the ways in which different churches conduct baptisms, there is no doubt whatsoever that we are impoverished, at least symbolically, by not practising baptism by immersion: that imagery of going down and coming up presents unequivocally the dying and rising which is essential to our doctrine of baptism.

Celebrating the new life of Christ, then, entails both sorrowing over, and rejoicing at, his death. Sorrowing over the sins, your sins and mine, which drove him to the cross, but rejoicing at that love which defies even death and overcomes not just the darkness of Christ's tomb, but the darkness of every tomb, every sin, every death as it blazes forth into the world. Celebrating our part in the new life of Christ is a parallel process: we sorrow at and repent of the sins which have separated us from his love, but we rejoice at those sins put to death on the cross and overcome in the resurrection. We weep at the weakness which necessitates death, but we laugh at being raised to life in Christ, for we have truly died with him in baptism, and now our life is something new, something different, something which does not belong to us alone, but to him in whom we are reborn.

What then, to do with this new life? Our reading from the letter to the Colossians is clear: set your minds on the things that are above, for your life is hidden with Christ in God. The new life to which we are raised is something which we don't at first see or understand, it is something which is hidden, and as with all things which are hidden, if we wish to see it we must first seek and find it.

If it is truly hidden with Christ in God, then we will find our life if we find Christ. Where should we be looking? In Luke's gospel, the women who, remember, are the first witnesses to the resurrection in every single narrative, are met by two mysterious figures who ask them "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" The resurrection which we proclaim is the final and ultimate sign that our attempts to pin God down, to control him, wrap him up in a place, a book, a hierarchy and even a person, will never be enough. Having fallen flat on our faces when we thought that love was dead, we are now confounded one more wonderful time by the refusal of God to play games, to gloat in his victory, to stand and take the applause which we are all too ready to give.

The women, and the disciples, find a tomb which is empty. Jesus has gone before them. They have, then, a choice: hang around, scouring the empty tomb, going in and looking at all there is to see, focusing on the absence of a body rather than a presence: or acting on

that injunction to follow, to go after Jesus, to allow themselves to be led not just home – for they, remember are Galileans – but also abroad, because Galilee is also the home of the Gentiles, the symbol of the gospel as it spreads from Jerusalem across and around the entire created world.

Our call is no different. Why do we seek the living among the dead? The risen life of Christ is here, there and everywhere, present us for all to see, in the vital and energetic life of the world around us, in the beauty of the created order, the magnificence of human endeavour, the resonance of music and the arts, the generosity of our neighbours, the love of those who make our lives what they are. And also, and just as vitally, the risen Christ lives in and with our needs and the needs of the world around us, with the pain of suffering and the anguish of injustice, hoping against hope that, despite all appearances to the contrary, light can come from darkness and life from death.

That life, in joy and in sorrow, is our life, and it is our responsibility to seek it and to find it, to know what this new life in Christ really is. Our life is hid with Christ in God and if we want to find that life we are unlikely to succeed unless we go where Christ goes, and try to live as he lived. That task, that search for true life, is what makes up what we call our own lives. Day by day and week by week we are called to live out, in lives of love, the new creation which God has brought into being in each of us.

But also, and often, and now, we are called to celebrate: we are invited to attend in praise and in exultation the birthday party which God has staged for us on this the day above all days. Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O hell, is your victory? Christ is risen and you are abolished. Christ is risen and the demons are cast down. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life is set free. Christ is risen and there is none left in the tomb: for Christ, being risen from the dead, has become the first fruits of those who sleep. To Him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.