

## EASTER DAY – 2010

The Rev. Graham Bland

A priest was telling a group of children about Jesus' resurrection and asked: "Does anyone know what Jesus said to his disciples after he rose from the dead?" A little girl put up her hand: "I know Father, I know!" "OK, what did he say?" The girl stood up, spread her hands in dramatic pose and sang out, "Ta-Da!"

Easter Day began with a sign, not quite the one the little girl imagined ... but it was a sign you couldn't miss, like a card on a pillow, a note on the fridge door handle, or flamingos on the lawn!

The women were certain to come to the tomb that morning. They needed to anoint Jesus' body – a task left incomplete after he died on the eve of the Sabbath.

The sign they encountered was an empty tomb, two men in dazzling white, and the words: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

Others thought the women's message about this was an idle tale. But as Jesus had told them long before ... on the third day he would rise again.

There are many signs in this place today ... this great congregation assembled so that we can encourage one another in the Easter faith; fine music; and the clothes!! (Can you tell I'm not too comfortable dressed this way!?)

And there is the story of our faith, a sign of peace from a loved one or a stranger, an atmosphere of welcome and friendship, bread broken and shared, the wine of new beginnings ...

All these are Easter signs ... signs of the transformation wrought in Jesus, and that continues here today. Maybe you wandered in here curious and for the first time today, wondering what this celebration is all about. Let me speak more personally for a moment:

I, along with many of you here, have come to know and believe that in Jesus, humankind saw the true face of God.

For after dying of suffocation on a criminal's cross, after lying dead in a tomb for 36 hours ... and just as surely as the sun rose over this place today and that is why the world is flooded with light ... this Jesus somehow got up, with the life on him again. And he was seen by many, who ate with him, talked with him, touched him, and who were so transformed by that experience that they spent the rest of their lives' energies spreading the news of all that God was doing in them and in the life of the world.

And because of their witness and the many other signs of God in the world, I have come to believe, to know as they did that God loves and cares deeply about us and the world, enough to want to make it anew. I want to spend my energies too, living in this hope.

Will these signs of which I speak be enough for you? Can I be certain that God will touch you as you hear this story? That part is up to God, not me. Yet I do pray fervently that God will move in your heart and life. For I know that death does not have the final say in my life or yours. The end is not death but life, life in God, revealed in Jesus, risen from the dead.

Today I imagine those women running down the ages to tell us of the signs they have seen of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. After so much time, it's remarkable that so many of us gather today across the earth to greet the women and to rejoice in their message.

The events are so far in the past. If Peter greeted the message with disbelief, how will people respond to it today?

In the absence of an empty tomb, what sign will tell us that death is defeated? We have dazzling clothes, that's for sure! Hardly angels though!??

If people ask us later about what we were doing here today, what shall we say? I imagine 2 things:

One dream of mine is that we will carry the Easter message to those who have not yet seen the signs ... I dream we will share how, here in this community, something new is coming to life, a community of love and companionship, where we find forgiveness in our brokenness, comfort in our sorrows, welcome in our loneliness and strength to confront evil and the power of death in our world.

This is not to claim too much. This community has all these qualities. No doubt we can identify shortcomings in ourselves or in others, or in some aspect of our community life. Of course, why else would we need God's grace??

Yet somehow, in Jesus, this community is getting up, with life on it. And I long for us to share this Good News ... that we at St. James believe in life, and here we are choosing to live in Jesus Christ instead of death.

Will others come to believe this too? All I know is that an authentic truth spoken from the heart has never failed to touch me. So let us pray simply that God will continue to renew us and that then we will take courage to tell others about the truth as we have experienced it.

As we heard on Good Friday, there are many human ways that serve the power of death – fear and hatred, greed and self-serving power. Yet in Jesus, our humanity rises to new life – God's love and strength flow into us, shaping us for humility and mercy and gracious living.

I imagine a second possibility for us in response to Easter:

As well as sharing with others the signs of God's new life in this community, I dream of new life flowing into this community from outside. There are many signs that the Word of God is transforming the world's life beyond here, in the places where we live and work, in our day-to-day experience. Easter is not the property of the Christian community – God's care and activity encompasses all things.

Easter Day declares that Life will prevail in the whole of our human and more than human world. Easter declares that, wherever the power of death threatens to suffocate the life out of people and communities, God is there, standing with those who suffer, calling forth their God-given strength, enabling them to resist and to defeat the power of death, to resist all that denies their God-given humanity and to uphold all that affirms it. Jesus lives and dies as one of us to show us that all life is holy.

Easter's Good News is that all of us are loved by God. All of our lives are of infinite value.

To declare that Jesus Christ is Risen is to say that all life is being renewed in him.

Whenever we affirm the humanity of those who have been persecuted, ostracized, marginalized or oppressed; whenever we welcome them back into community, there is Easter.

Whenever we rise above the temptation to de-humanize others - because of their religious affiliation, or race, or sexual orientation, or because of their beliefs or point of view or way of life - there is Easter in our own experience.

Wherever schoolchildren stand together to resist rather than to participate in bullying, wherever they learn respect for the rich diversity of our humanity, there is Easter.

Wherever workplaces become environments of respect and trust, there is Easter.

Wherever ancient Churches take courage, however slowly and reluctantly, to acknowledge and atone for the abuse of vulnerable children whose trust was betrayed by those on whom they should have been most able to count ... Wherever such truth begins to be spoken, Easter is dawning.

As sure as the sun rose today and now fills this church with light, God lives and moves in our wider world, transforming and renewing it. Often God does this through the Church and, where necessary, in spite of the Church!

Easter calls us into a two-way street:

First we are called out beyond this place, to go and tell of the signs of new life that we find in this community and in the Gospel.

Second, out there, beyond this place, we are called to watch for the signs of God at work in the world. They are everywhere!

Then let us return here to celebrate all the signs we find that point to God. You know those “Men At Work” signs. This is about looking for all the places where you can see: “God’s Love At Work” and encouraging one another with the news of them.

We are an Easter community. Today is Easter Day, and every Sunday is Easter Sunday.

Every Sunday we gather in the faith of Easter, drawing strength from one another and from God so that we might live out God’s love beyond this place in a way that transforms our part of the world ... so that we might live in Christ instead of death. Jesus Christ is Risen indeed! Praise be!