

Sermon for Easter Sunday, 2021

Isaiah 12. 1 Peter 1:3-9. Psalm 114.
John 20:1-10.

The Collect: Almighty God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ has overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: strengthen and increase our faith, that we may know him and the power of his resurrection, and live to thy glory for ever; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with thee and the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1 Peter 1:6 ‘Rejoice in this, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials...’

Don’t say that; you’ll put them off! It’s like telling people that it will be a thrill to jump off the cliffs into the blue lagoon, but there is a risk that there are hidden rocks, and they might not come up alive. Is the thrill worth it? Only an idiot would do it without a moment’s reservation. Some might not do it at all. In which category are you? Are you a risk-taker, or risk averse?

As we celebrate Easter today, though in very unusual circumstances, we are not new to the Christian story. We know that Jesus was ill-treated, put to death unjustly, and died. We know that He was not found by Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John when they rushed to the garden tomb; because death had not kept him there trapped in a decaying body. We have a good idea what hymns will be sung on Easter Day, and we look forward to receiving the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Many will gloss over the religious themes of this Bank Holiday weekend, and just gorge themselves on lamb and chocolate eggs. It’s all very nice! As John Le Mesurier, Sergeant Wilson in Dad’s Army, said as he neared death after a long illness: ‘It’s all been rather lovely.’

But, if you were a Jewish or Gentile Christian in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia etc around 62AD, you would be living in fear of persecution, instigated by the Roman Emperor Nero. He thought imaginatively about how to get the maximum glow out of Christians tarred in pitch and set alight to illuminate the arena. His egotism and cruelty seemed to go unrestrained. Nearer to our own day, there are Christians who live with the reality that their throats could be cut by militant Islamists as they kneel in a row of martyrs on a Libyan beach. Then, in a less dramatic twist, but not less costly, Christian marriage registrars, midwives, and public servants lose their livelihood in our own supposedly liberal society because they refuse to twist the meaning of words with respect to gender and the murder of babies.

The First Epistle of Peter to the exiles in dispersion across what is modern-day Turkey and northern Greece, is written to encourage them, and acknowledges the hard times that have

come upon them. These trials were to recur throughout the history of Christian faith; crossing borders and time. Some were even perpetrated within the household of coreligionists - I hardly dare call them fellow believers because they allowed fanaticism to drive them to wicked travesties and claimed they were doing the work of God.

But, to be a Christian is to be chosen, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and obedient to Jesus. It will also involve being sprinkled with His blood; namely, sacrifice. We are told in Philippians 3:10 that we will know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering. In short, if we join with Christ, we are going to suffer, as He did. There is a cost in this life. The question is: who will be prepared to sign up to this fellowship of suffering? The decision will be either an human gamble, or an instinct of faith. Either way, there will be a reckoning and a payout.

St Peter tells the dispersed Christians that their faith will be tested like gold and may be shown to be genuine when Jesus Christ is revealed at the time of judgement. Meanwhile, we **must** be genuine, sincerely loving our fellow believers from the heart, putting away malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander. Christ has been kind to us, so let us do our very best to display the same quality to onlookers, even when they speak against us as wrongdoers.

Death comes to us all; without exception. It is then that we will all be tested for the last time. Indeed, it will be demonstrated in the Highest Court whose faith and life has been genuinely ordered towards the glory of God.

Easter is not just for chocolate, it's for everlasting life!

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.