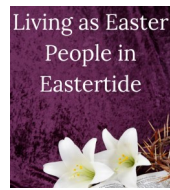


*A note from St. James' Pastoral Care
April 2023, Eastertide*



Dear Friend,

HAPPY EASTER! This liturgical season is longer than any other but Pentecost - a whole fifty days - right up to the Day of Pentecost itself. Ascension Day, celebrated forty days after Easter, is included within this holy time of celebration. For that fifty days, the tall Pascal Candle ("the Light of Christ") is lit at every Service and stands in a prominent place for all to see. After the last Service on Pentecost, it is retired, usually to a place near the Baptismal Font, and only used at Baptisms and Funerals till the next Easter. (There - that's my "Easter Trivia" for today!)

There is an Easter anthem familiar to many called "This Joyful Eastertide", which has been sung on several Easters past by the St. James' Choir and was sung by a quartet at the very beginning of this Easter Sunday's Service as an Introit. The verses tell the Gospel story of the Resurrection, but it is the Refrain which I find particularly arresting:

"Had Christ, who once was slain,
not burst his three-day prison,
our faith has been in vain:
but now hath Christ arisen,
arisen, arisen,
arisen!" (George Ratcliffe Woodward)

The Bible verses which seem tied to this chorus are from 1 Corinthians 15: 17-20, which - like the anthem - stress the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is THE central belief of the Christian Faith: without it, what's the point?



Here are some Christian writers explaining what that cornerstone belief - that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive forevermore - and not just in some poetic fashion, but FOR REAL - means for them:

John Stott: "We live and die; Christ died and lived!"

C.S. Lewis: "Christ has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so."

N.T. Wright: "The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you're now invited to belong to it."

Henri Nouwen: "The resurrection is God's way of revealing to us that...what belongs to God will never get lost."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's yes to Christ and to his atoning work."

Frederick Buechner: "(Christ's) Resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing."

I could go on and on quoting others who have trusted and followed Jesus, but I would very humbly offer my own "take" on this stupendous event, for whatever it's worth...

On the Second Sunday of Easter, we always read the Gospel Story of Thomas, who had claimed he not only had to see but to touch the Risen Jesus in order to believe. After Jesus appears to all the disciples and offers Thomas a chance to touch His wounds, Thomas, seeing Him with them, simply falls at Jesus's feet, affirming his new-found belief: "My Lord and My God!" Jesus' answer, I believe, is for everyone who has lived AFTER Jesus' Ascension: "Have you believed because you have seen me? BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE COME TO BELIEVE." (John 20:29)

Because of that verse, I choose to believe, which for me means trusting Jesus and trying to follow Him, stumble and fall though I often do. I also choose to believe because of the "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) in times past and also whom I have known during my life, whose lives have seemed richer, deeper and filled with more love, purpose and meaning because they are Christians. By God's grace, so I will continue. - And you?

Now, here are the rest of the Gospels that carry us almost to the end of the Easter Season:

April 23	Luke 24: 13-35
April 30	John 10: 1-10
May 7	John 14: 1-14
May 14	John 14: 15-21

“Good Shepherd Sunday”, always the Fourth Sunday of Easter, always uses Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd”, and some part of Chapter 10 in John’s Gospel, which is about sheep and Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Here are two sonnets by Malcolm Guite, both on this theme:

I am The Door of the Sheepfold

Not one that’s gently hinged or deftly hung,
Not like the ones you planed at Joseph’s place,
Not like the well-oiled openings that swung
So easily for Pilate’s practiced pace,
Not like the ones that closed in Mary’s face
From house to house in brimming Bethlehem,
Not like the one that no man may assail,
The dreadful curtain, The forbidding veil
That waits your breaking in Jerusalem.
Not one you made but one you have become:
Load-bearing, balancing, a weighted beam
To bridge the gap, to bring us within reach
Of your high pasture. Calling us by name,
You lay your body down across the breach,
Yourself the door that opens into home.

I Am The Good Shepherd

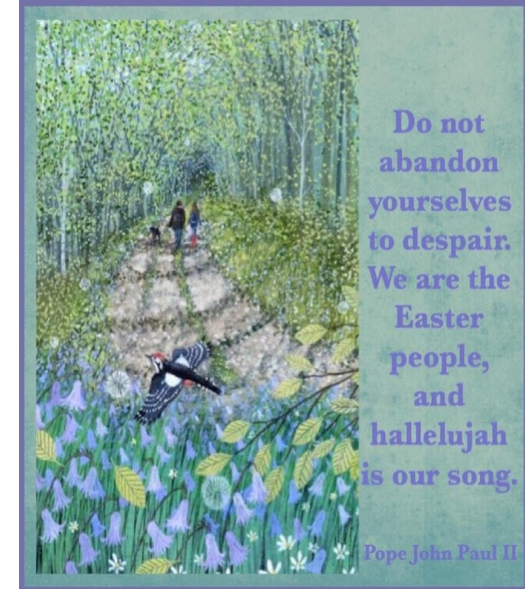
When so much shepherding has gone so wrong,
So many pastors hopelessly astray,
The weak so often preyed on by the strong,
So many bruised and broken on the way,
The very name of shepherd seems besmeared,
The fold and flock themselves are torn in half,
The lambs we left to face all we have feared
Are caught between the wasters and the wolf.
Good Shepherd now your flock has need of you,
One finds the fold and ninety-nine are lost
Out in the darkness and the icy dew,
And no one knows how long this night will last.
Restore us; call us back to you by name,
And by your life laid down, redeem our shame.

Finally, here’s the Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Easter, from “An Australian Anglican Prayer Book” (1978):

Ever-living God, help us to celebrate joyfully the resurrection of the Lord and to express in our lives the love we celebrate. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

May you have a joyful Eastertide!
(M.C.)

With Love and Prayers
from your St. James’
Parish Family



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