

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Easter Vigil and Service of Light – 11th April 2020

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The opening words of the gospel set the scene for us *“after the Sabbath, on the first day of the week”*. Let us pause there and reflect on what God did on the very first first day of the week when the world was created. As we heard from our first reading a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep and God said, *“Let there be light”; and there was light*”. The very first thing God gave this world was light that overcame the darkness. John in his gospel tells us that Jesus was there at the creation of the world and goes on to say *“What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”*. (John 1:4-5) And later in John, Jesus says, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”* (John 8:12). Paul in his letter to the Corinthians writes *“It is God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (Corinthians 2:4-6) and in his letter to Colossians “God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13)*

And lastly, in his first letter, John writes *“God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”* (1 John 1:5) Through to the last chapter of the last book of the bible, Revelation, where we have this glorious picture where there will be no more darkness but eternal light. We will have no need for light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be our light. (Revelation 22:5)

But back to our gospel reading. When we piece together the different accounts of the Resurrection in the gospels, we can probably say that Mary Magdalene left home in the dark but when she arrived at the tomb it was just after sunrise, light had come into the world. What a beautiful image. Mary had come into the

light or was it that the light had come into Mary's world? It doesn't matter which. The darkness that had come over Calvary when Jesus hung on the cross was replaced with light – the light of the resurrected Jesus, the Christ.

So why am I hammering on about light and darkness so much? It is because there is darkness in the world right now and darkness brings with it despondency, dejection, decline and depression. We hear reports of hundreds and thousands of deaths. In this area we are caught between the European hot spots, with Italy to the east of us with 19,000 dead so far and Spain to the west of us with 16,000 dead so far. And naturally this gives rise to fear; fear for the safety of our friends, families and perhaps ourselves. Fear simply rises in us when confronted with a threat of death. The fear is palpable, it's physical. It takes the form of an adrenaline burst, makes the heart race, giving us the energy to flee for survival, if necessary, but we cannot for now there is nowhere in the world to flee to; nowhere that is safe. We have to stay confined with this feeling of helplessness. Over time, the stresses of fear take their toll in many ways. They wear us down physically, mentally and possibly spiritually.

But listen to the gospel. First, we have the guards who are filled with fear when the earth quakes and the stone rolls away from the entrance to the tomb. As a side story this is an interesting picture. Those who are alive supposedly watching over the dead man who has become alive became like dead men themselves but it is the first words of the angel to the women that we should listen to. Do not be afraid. You need not fear. Do not be afraid for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he is risen just as He said He would. These words 'do not be afraid' are not said as an instruction but as words of comforting assurance. Do not be afraid for God is true to His word. God has done, is doing now and always will do what He says.

So, what has God told us? He hasn't said that we won't get the virus. He hasn't said that we won't die from the virus but He has said that He will never leave us. He has said that He will always be with us through the end of life on this earth and beyond. Though we walk through fire we shall not be burned, the flames will not consume us. When we pass through waters I, God, will be with you, the rivers will not overwhelm you. And if you read last Sunday's reflection you will know that Jesus also said "*do not be anxious about your life*" (Matthew 6:25). If we choose to be troubled, if we choose to be anxious it is because we are not taking Jesus, God at his word "*For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love*" (2 Timothy 1:7)

There is darkness, despondency and depression in our Christian community and there should not be. We can be afraid if we walk in the darkness but not if we walk in the light of the resurrected Jesus. There was never a time like this when we can show the difference that believing in Jesus Christ makes to the Christian life. Wouldn't it be great if everybody we have contact with asked us why are you so peaceful, why are you so stress-free, why so tranquil, why so untroubled, why so happy? As followers of the resurrected Christ, we owe this to our friends and families, we owe it to ourselves, and we owe it to God to be that witness.

What a wonderful text to begin Easter with. This is the text which, if you believe it, makes you a Christian but if you don't believe it then you are a non-Christian. With the resurrection of Jesus, God's power has overturned all expectation in our world. We have nothing from which to coil into self-protection. It is not a story of long ago that has little relevance today. It is the story that has the most effect today for it gives us the power to be strong. It gives us the power to turn our fear into faith and fidelity; to turn our panic into prayer and praise and to turn our worry into worship and witness.

I wish you and yours a very happy and healthy Eastertide.

Amen