

## SERMON PREACHED AT SJH EASTER DAY YEAR C 21 APRIL 2019

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

It's marvellous to be here today, celebrating one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The resurrection of Jesus is the heart of the earliest proclamation of the gospel, the good news. Just as during Lent we have traced the cross throwing a deepening shadow over Jesus' ministry, so we can now, in Easter, see everything he said and did in a new way, illuminated by the light of the resurrection.

There are different ways of thinking about the resurrection, because we are dealing with a miracle and a mystery. For some people the tomb being empty is essential to their faith; others may not be sure about that, but are convinced that Jesus is alive in their present experience. What is common to New Testament views on the resurrection is that it makes a difference to Christians in the here and now of this life. S. Paul wrote this to the Colossians: 'Christ in you is the hope of glory'. There is a present reality for Christians: Christ is in us! It is this present reality that gives the hope of glory in the future. And it's worth noting that the word 'you' is plural. We experience the risen Christ in the Christian community as well as in our hearts.

S. Paul also puts this indwelling image the other way round: we are 'in Christ'. Again this has a community aspect: he talks about Christians making up the body of Christ. In God's purpose the Church is Christ's presence in the world. Jesus is present in the love we show to the world by our good actions, through hearing and proclaiming the scriptures, through celebrating the sacraments, and in Christian fellowship which is open to others on their journeys.

In today's gospel we heard of Mary Magdalene, Peter and the beloved disciple, traditionally identified with John, finding the tomb empty. Realisation of what has happened comes gradually. Then he appears to Mary, and again it takes a while for her to realise it is Jesus. He tells her not to cling to him because he has not yet ascended to the Father. He hasn't come back to life just as before. Resurrection is not the restoring of the former life to a corpse. He has changed, and the lives of his followers will be changed.

Jesus had told his followers that unless he ascended to the Father – left them – the Holy Spirit could not be sent to them. This is another way of thinking about the resurrection. The Holy Spirit is

Jesus' continuing presence in the church and the world. The Spirit is the 'other Comforter' whom Jesus had promised to the disciples.

Our experience in this life of being 'in Christ', or knowing the presence of the Holy Spirit – whichever way of thinking we find more helpful – gives us confidence for personal resurrection after death. We are created in God's image, and what he has created will not be destroyed by death. We will continue to live in his love, and the resurrection of his Son shows that his love is stronger than death, even though it is the ultimate tragedy of this life. This is a sure hope; it does not take away the pain of separation, but it promises that the separation is not final. 'All will be made alive in Christ,' S. Paul declares to the church at Corinth, where some seem to be doubting resurrection full stop.

Baptism is the sacrament most closely connected with our sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The symbolism is seen most clearly in baptism by total immersion: we go down into water and then rise out of it. That is why we renew our baptismal vows at Easter, promising to die to sin and turn to Christ. As with all worship, it is only meaningful if it expresses what we are doing in our lives. The other direction is significant too: what we do has another layer of meaning when we see that it expresses the union we have with the risen Christ. So today let us open our hearts to the change the risen Christ brings. Let us see the Christ in each other. Let us be Easter people!