

Festal Evensong, Easter Day

Song of Solomon 3. 2-5; 8. 6-7 and Revelation 1. 12-18

Mother Emma

The idea of new life is one which is endlessly exciting and appealing. Most of us - people of faith or of no faith, in all corners of the world - are touched by the sight of a new baby, a puppy, a kitten, a baby lamb or the first snowdrops appearing from the cold winter ground. Since time immemorial, humankind has gathered at this time of year around the Spring Equinox, to celebrate and give thanks for the return of the lighter days, the first signs of spring, the new buds bursting forth with all the promise they bring of warmer and brighter times to come. The secular symbols of Easter, the flowers, bunnies and baby chicks also reflect this sense of hope and joy created by the coming of Spring. But how much greater is the hope for those of us who also gather to worship on this day inspired with joy and thanksgiving at the glory of the Risen Christ? This day is the climax of the Christian year; it is the very foundation of our faith.

As Pope John Paul II declared, "*We are the Easter people and Alleluia is our song.*" There is an important difference between the new life celebrated by people everywhere as they rejoice in the coming of Spring, and the new life remembered at Easter by Christians across the world.

Our Paschal, or Easter candle burns today by the altar as a symbol, not of a cyclical new life, a life which will run its course, passing through summer and autumn back into winter, but of a new life promised to us for all eternity. Throughout the year, we shall light this candle at every baptism, as we welcome new Christians into the fellowship of the church, but also at every funeral, as we remember that because of this Easter Resurrection, we can trust that even those whose earthly course is run, may still rejoice with us in the promise of eternal life.

As Christ tells Mary Magdalene, he returns to us to share with us the glad news that Death is not the end, but that now he is ascending to his God, and to our God, to his Father and our Father. We can believe that we too can look ahead to the moment when this promise is also fulfilled for us, and we are re-united with Christ and with all those we love in the glory of God's kingdom.

In that best-known of all Easter hymns, we praise God, "*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son, Endless is the victory, Thou o'er death hast won.*" But this is not to say that the new life we celebrate today is only a promise for when we die, and that we should simply wait for our own Resurrection. In one of my favourite Easter hymns, we remember that it is not only Christ who rises on Easter Day, but all of us who rise with him as Easter people to serve God *here* in the world by living out that new life of hope and love: "*That we, with our hearts in Heaven, here on earth may fruitful be.*"

Imagine if, by the light of Christ shining out of our lives, we could transmit to others that uplifting of the spirit we all feel when we see our first Spring blossom on the trees. Whatever the weather, but especially on a day like today, the sight of trees in blossom can send us the message that something is stirring beneath the earth, a promise of good things to come. Likewise, although we continue to live in a fallen world, a world scarred by grief and violence and pain, by warfare and tragic accident, by sickness and economic hardship, here and there, a glimpse of Christ's promise of new life revealed in kindness, sensitivity, generosity, hospitality or unselfishness can offer others a glimpse of Easter joy and hope, not just today, but throughout the years ahead.

As we live lives of thankfulness and hope, we can inspire and encourage others to look more deeply, to discern the quiet stirrings of God's love and mercy which lie deep within the human heart, and which call us all to live Christ's risen life.

As we work together to create a fairer society, a more peaceful world, greater respect and justice between individuals, groups and nations, we can play our part as Easter people to reveal a new life, a foretaste of the eternal life to come, in which all people can declare, *"Alleluia is our song."*

At every baptism, a candle is lit from the Easter candle and given to the child (or more likely to one of their godparents!) with the reminder, *"God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and has given us a place with the saints in light. You have received the light of Christ, walk in this light all the days of your life."*

So, this Easter light and life we celebrate today is passed on to each one of us at the start of our Christian journey, so that we may walk, safe in God's love, working to lighten the darkness of the world, and to share with others the joy and the hope we experience today. Alleluia! Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia! **Amen**