

5th April 2026 – Easter Day Matins

Song of Solomon 3: 2-5, 8:6-7 and John 20: 11-20

Mother Emma

“Christ is Risen! Death is not the end.”

Some weeks ago, I was privileged to take part in a Zoom conversation, along with a number of clergy colleagues, with a parish priest from a small town near to the city of Zaporizhzhia in southeastern Ukraine, close to the sites of some of the most bitter fighting in the ongoing war.

After he described his daily life as a priest through an interpreter, he spoke of the widows, the bereaved parents, the families waiting for news of those fighting in the front line, who made up much of his current congregation. We listened with awe and emotion at his courage as he described his ministry in the midst of constant fear and threat. When we reached the Q & A session, a London priest asked him, *“How do you preach Easter in a war-zone?”* He answered simply, *“I will preach that Death is not the end.”* Many of us had tears in our eyes as he expressed with such faith, the real meaning of the Resurrection which we celebrate today, and the essential truth of that eternal hope won for us by Jesus in his victory over Death.

We come here together this morning to rejoice and give thanks for Christ’s rising from the dead – the story which forms the foundation of our Christian faith. We can give thanks that at this time, at least, we are able to do so in freedom and joy, in the peaceful surroundings of a historic building, enhanced by wonderful flowers and beautiful music, in the presence of friends and family, as the Spring begins and we feel that summer may eventually be here. Those of us who have walked over the past days through the depths of sorrow at Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, mock trial, torture and execution, can feel that amazing lifting of the spirits as we experience once again that moment when we know that it was not in vain. We are aware today that across the world, others are celebrating Easter in the midst of war and conflict, in hiding from persecution, perhaps themselves imprisoned or unfairly condemned, and that, even now, threats of terrible destruction hold our world hostage as we await the days ahead. We might wonder whether humanity has come very far in the centuries since Christ was abused and crucified in Jerusalem, as we see the continuing greed and power-craving and violence of our world.

Perhaps on a personal level, we have faced loss or tragedy in the year which has passed since we last stood together to proclaim *“Christ is Risen!”*, and have struggled to see for ourselves the outworking of the promise we celebrate today. Christ’s rising does not negate the very real suffering of the world. It is not an easy panacea or a mere platitude in the face of human grief or pain – on the contrary, the story of Holy Week reminds us year by year that in our own suffering, Christ stands beside us because he himself has experienced betrayal, loss and pain.

Our Gospel reading opened with Mary Magdalene, coming now that the Sabbath is over, to weep at Jesus’ grave, overcome by the depth of her grief, like so many we see on our screens today, mourning the loss of those killed in conflict or violence. And yet, and yet...

Christ rises from the tomb – he returns to show us in his own Body that death has not been able to hold him, and to tell Mary Magdalene that he is ascending to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God. Suddenly, all the promises we remembered this week during his final Supper with his disciples make sense – that he goes ahead of us to prepare a place for us, and that where he is,

there we shall also be. This is the promise of eternal hope, on which we can draw to sustain and comfort us when the world does its worst. It came through the great cost of Christ's self-sacrifice, but as a free gift of mercy and grace to us.

Perhaps we may feel that we have done nothing to deserve this gift of eternal redemption – but we may also think, as I said at the Eucharist on Tuesday, of the Good Friday hymn which reminds us that *"Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."* And what would this gift of our souls and lives look like in today's world?

I spoke on Maundy Thursday of Christ's unconditional and humble love for us, a love demonstrated in humility and service as he washed the feet of his disciples. In response to the promise which can give us strength and hope and courage today, we are asked to show humility, service and love to others. Every day we hear of great acts of violence, often against the poor and those who have no voice, or those called up to serve their country to satisfy the power-seeking of their rulers. We might rightly say that we take no part in them. But such big picture occurrences are the natural fruit of the self-orientation, prejudice, anger or hostility which lie deep within every human heart.

The story of Easter should above all remind us that as we come to follow Christ, we are asked to follow him in service, in self-sacrifice and in compassionate love. If every Christian were to demonstrate these consistently to their neighbours, we would constantly see around us glimmers of the inbreaking of God's kingdom of justice and peace. Today we are here in joy, in thanksgiving and in hope as we receive the promise that *"Death is not the end."*

May we carry the eternal hope which we have received, out from this place into the world, where we may act as God's agents of reconciliation and love, even amidst the brokenness. We shall pray in our final hymn: *That we, Lord, with hearts in heaven, here on earth may fruitful be, and by angel-hands be gathered, and be ever safe with thee.*

Amen