**Sermon: Easter Day 2021**

Alleluia! CHRIST IS RISEN! (Congregational response should be: HE IS RISEN INDEED! Alleluia!).

What a wonderful exclamation! There is nothing on earth that can beat or stop this glorious proclamation. Not the most ardent of atheists like Dawkins or Hawkins. Nor the most oppressive dictatorships of the world, even though they try. Nor a pandemic or death itself – even though they all try. Because Christ has indeed risen from the dead and broken the chains of death.

As we gather together on this most Holy day, we do so to thank God and praise him for this most awesome act. For without Jesus’ resurrection, and the grace of God, none of us would be in this Church today. Our lives would be totally different, for they would not have Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, within them. Indeed, our whole world would be a totally different place – a place beyond comprehension. A world bereft of God’s incarnate love and truth.

But thankfully Jesus is in our lives, and today, as we witness to the act of God’s grace in resurrecting Jesus from the dead, we can see his love for us, and all humanity, for he has shown that death no-longer has a hold on creation. By the raising of Jesus from the dead God has shown to us that there is more to life than just this life – there is eternal life for those who believe. Yes we will die physically as Christ himself died physically. We are conditioned to die, as death is a part of nature – but it is not the end. For Christ – as we heard in our Gospel reading just a moment ago - gives us a glimpse of that eternal life in his body – his raised body. His body has been transformed, yet it is still similar. It is different, otherwise Mary Magdalene would have recognised him instantly, and yet the same. However, when she heard Jesus call her name, she recognised him instantly. Jesus called her by name, and she responded.

Mary had a personal invitation from the Lord to see him risen from the dead. She was the first to see the risen Christ, and she could have kept this news to herself, but she didn’t. She couldn’t hang on to this information. No. She had to go and spread the good news, telling the disciples and probably others. Mary could not but help to tell others of this good news for so great and immense was the joy that filled her heart upon seeing her Lord alive again. One can barely imagine her joy, and yet this is the joy we celebrate today. A joy that is over-flowing and itching to be told to others.

As people of the resurrection, this is our joy. It is our joy today. It is our joy tomorrow. And it is and should be our joy for the remaining 363 days of the year. Christ is risen from the dead. He is no-longer dead and buried, but alive and lives in each one of us.

At some point in our lives, each of us have been given a personal invitation to come to the risen Christ and share this joy. It is an honour and a privilege to be called to share in this joy. But do we live out this joy in our lives as we see Mary did, telling other people? Often we don’t, possibly because we our British reserve, societal or governmental rules won’t allow us to. Or possibly it’s because we’re not entirely convinced of this good news ourselves yet. But regardless of the reason, at our baptisms we were commissioned to be ‘soldiers’ or ‘disciples of Christ’ who take every opportunity to proclaim the Good News of Christ by works of love and faith, and to tell the story of salvation afresh to each and every generation. We are to live as Easter People – not afraid of death but rather confident in the eternal joys that await us – and to radiate that joy in our being. Now I’m not suggesting that we all try to imitate Ned Flanders from the Simpson’s and be annoyingly joyful in each and every situation. Nor am I suggesting that we all become like Billy Graham, a great evangelist of yester-year. But I am proposing that we try, when the opportunity arrives, to tell others of the love of God as shown in the resurrection and that we try to live our everyday lives with a smile, confident that we have something to smile about – for we certainly do.

The impact of God’s love and grace can, for instance be seen in the life of John Newton and his call to faith. At the time of his conversion to faith he was slave trader, but gradually he heard the voice of God calling him to follow his Son and share his joy. Newton was amazed that God could call someone so vile as him – a slave trader with a chequered past – to redemption. He felt totally unworthy – as indeed we all are. He could not forget his past, nor the sheer extent of God’s grace in personally inviting him to become a follower of Christ: a follower of God’s Son who gave his life so that he/we might be freed from the bondage’s of sin. And consequently he wrote the Hymn Amazing Grace, to chart the extent of God’s grace and love.

God’s love and grace is totally amazing. It is freely given and open to all. Today, as we celebrate the Easter mystery afresh, we see that Amazing Grace shining out of the empty tomb and in the transformed body of the risen Christ. Ours today is the joy. Ours today is the victory, for Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!