

Homily by Canon Philip Dyson  
**Sunday 4th April 2021 - Easter Sunday**

Readings (Year B): 1st: Acts 10:34. 37-43. Psalm 117. 2nd:  
Colossians 3:1-4. Gospel: John 20:1-9.

It would be very easy in this continuing time of pandemic to find ourselves stuck in a Good Friday world. Despite the vaccine and the protection it gives, there is still much uncertainty around, both here, especially as people move around, and many appearing to flout the rules that help to stem the spread of the virus. The picture across the world is not on the whole great. The problems continue to batter us, in some cases overwhelm us; strain our ability to cope and get life back to some sort of normal.

St John tells of the empty tomb's discovery in terms of a new dawn. Light and sight are often used by John in his Gospel when treating of faith; and this story uses them in testimony to the first faith in the resurrection. It was 'still dark' may denote not only the time of day, but all time before the resurrected 'light of the world.'

Mary of Magdala can explain what she sees only by usual experience - the removal of a corpse by men. Peter sees more. While he goes 'right into the tomb' and sees the linen cloths, we are yet to be told of the 'other disciple (probably John). He sees what they saw –but sees beyond. Perhaps because he was known to have surpassed others in love of Jesus; he it is on whom the light of faith shines first; 'He saw and believed.' It is from within this new sight of faith that understanding flows; as promised in scriptural history, as we say in the creed 'and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.'

If we reflect on our own response when someone we love, someone dear to us dies, how do we react? As Christians we are undergirded by our faith in the risen Lord. As St Paul right says 'If Christ is not risen, then is our faith in vain.' Obviously every person is different, but as we grieve we go through the different stages of grief, not just a sudden switch from darkness to light. A gradual growing in faith. All this we see this Easter Day 2021.

The last Easter Day I preached in 2019, I used the word Resurgam: 'I will rise.' A word scratched on a beam of St Andrew's Anglican Church in Plymouth following its complete burn out in the bombing of March 1941, a beam over the main door that is still there today.

A similar experience at Coventry: Resurgam: I will rise.  
In both those and many similar cases it took time as we know.

Speaking earlier of darkness moving to light, another true story I have used but I hope a helpful reminder. In the darkest days of Stalinist Russia a special 'League of the Godless' was established to stamp out the last vestiges of religion from people's lives. One Easter Sunday morning the Commissar of this league addressed a huge rally in Moscow's Red Square. He ranted along his usual lines that religion is the instrument of the bourgeoisie and the opium of the proletariat.

At the end of his harangue he generously offered the microphone to anybody who wished to debate with him. Nobody wanted a one-way ticket to Siberia until one old man made his way forward. He surveyed his huge audience, cleared his throat and began to sing: 'The Lord is risen.' It was the traditional Orthodox Easter greeting.

Moved by the old man's courage, voices from the square slowly swelled up in reply: 'He has truly risen.' Religion was not dead as long as belief in the resurrection of Christ was not dead in people. Easter must always be our realisation that Christ is risen: Christ is alive: alive in the Father's glory, but also alive in us.

We've 50 days to enjoy: Alleluia; he is risen indeed.

Canon Philip Dyson