

Sunday 17 April 2022

A sermon preached by the Dean of Melbourne, the Very Revd Dr Andreas Loewe, at St Paul's Cathedral at the Easter Vigil, Easter Day 2022

Readings: [Romans 6.3-11](#), [Matthew 28.1-10](#)

Nothing was the same on the first day of the week, as the women made their way in the darkness of Easter Day, to pay their last respects to their dead teacher and friend, Jesus. When they arrived at the place where they had laid him to rest—a rock tomb that only a couple of days ago had been sealed and placed under secure guard—they found the tomb open and empty. A messenger greeted them and told them: ‘He is not here, but he is risen’ and invited them to look for themselves and see that the tomb truly was empty. ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will meet him’, the messengers told them. As they went to tell their friends of the incredible news that the tomb was empty, they met Jesus on the way. Alive, still carrying in him the wounds of the crucifixion.

During the next week they would see Jesus again and again, sharing food with them, sharing the Scriptures with them. And they gradually came to understand that the things that Jesus had taught them about how he would suffer and die, and on the third day rise again from the dead, had indeed been fulfilled. That the Jesus they had seen die on the cross was alive. That the same Jesus whom they had buried, had risen. His body still bearing the bruises of the whip of his torturers, still showing the marred hands and arms where he had been nailed to the cross. His side still wounded by the lance. His body still the same as on the day he was laid to his rest. But changed, alive. The same Jesus whom they buried and mourned, now had been raised. And in all his encounters with them, Jesus invited them to see for themselves that it was truly him; that he was truly alive.

The resurrection of Jesus changes the way we think about our world. By rising again from the dead, Jesus has opened the way to a life that is forever. A life that is transformed, changed. A life in which death no longer has the final word. 'Those who believe', we are told, 'will live even though they die'. In our epistle reading from the letter to the Romans, our patron Saint Paul tells us that we can share in this new life when we seek baptism. When we follow Jesus in discipleship, turning from our old way of doing things and instead turning to Jesus. When we let ourselves be washed with water, as a symbol of our being cleansed from sin. When we let ourselves be anointed with oil, as a sign of our being renewed inwardly. Paul tells us that 'all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death'. That message makes much sense from the view point of Easter: in the light of the resurrection we would want to share Christ's death—the death that opens life forever: 'so that just as Christ was raised from the dead, so we too might walk in newness of life'.

In a moment we will be baptising and confirming new Christians. Rachel, William, Glenn, Seong, Andrew and Kale will each be asked to reject all that is evil, and turn to Christ. They will affirm that they reject selfish living, and instead seek to follow the way of Christ. Each one of us who has received baptism and confirmation have made the same promises—to turn away from evil, and instead to make Christ the compass for our life. That's why we will be inviting each one of you who is already a Christian to reaffirm the baptismal promises with them. Having Christ as your compass means living in a way that puts God and neighbour first, and self second. It means living aware of the very real presence of sin and evil in our world, and actively working for justice, goodness and peace. It means living in the trust that, by his death on the cross and by his resurrection, Christ has overcome the power of sin and death altogether, there still is work to be done. The power of sin and death has been broken at a fundamental level in the first Easter night. That's true. But the effects of sin and death still echo through the generations. Sin and death do not hold us enslaved any more, Paul tells us. That is true. But we still face evil and death daily.

The work of a Christian in the world is to stand opposed to the forces of evil and death. Paul speaks of considering ourselves 'dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus'. Being dead to sin means repenting of our wrongs, and seeking forgiveness—means metanoia. The Greek word means a profound change of mind and action; a 180 degree turn. It means rejecting all that is false and unjust, and finding strength in the good news that Christ came to bring. It means

renouncing all forms of evil, and Satan—evil personified itself—and actively working for peace and justice, goodness and love in our world. It means living as an example to others, encouraging family and friends to share in our conviction that sin and death do not have the final word, but that we are free to choose life and love. ‘The death Christ died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God’. And in the strength of that death, sin is broken and life is granted when we each choose to live for God. That was true for the women who found the tomb empty on the first Easter morning, and it is true for each one of us who chooses to turn from evil and to Christ, who has been baptised into the death of Christ, so that we might walk in newness of life.

I give thanks that in this service Rachel, William, Glenn, Seong, Andrew and Kale will make their own commitment to follow Christ in being dead to sin and live to God. I give thanks for the many millions of Christians, the world over, who share in affirming this truth today. Because while the news of the empty tomb is good news for each of us individually, it is good news for the cosmos—for all created beings. In Christ Jesus, God himself took on himself the dust of the earth and became a human being. At Calvary, Jesus gave himself so that all might share the life that is forever. On the cross he redeemed all creation and renewed this broken world. And that gives me hope for this world, so in need of salvation—both physically as we face a climate crisis, and spiritually as we face a crisis of confidence. At Easter, we give thanks that the God who has taken on the dust of the earth has by his self giving on the cross, claimed the entire world for himself. That the brokenness that we face, as individuals, and as a society, are not irredeemable, but may be healed. That the new creation is alive and among us, wherever people follow Christ, turn from evil and work for justice and truth, goodness and peace.

You will have noticed the giant globe behind me. During Holy Week and Eastertide we have brought the planet into the Cathedral; to encourage people to see the world as God sees it. As whole and not fragmented. As fragile and in need of saving. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promised: ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’. The inheritance promised to those who live humbly is not a distant heavenly home, but the very planet we live on. For Jesus, there is no Planet B. Nor is there for us. The current climate emergency we face, with unprecedented floods on Australia’s East Coast, and the danger of a scorcher summer bringing massive bushfires, tells us that we have not lived humbly. We have exploited the earth by our

extractive economies. In order for us to gain the blessing Jesus promises, we need to turn from our former ways and urgently rediscover a reverence for the planet on which we live.

The climate emergency we face calls for radical metanoia—the same repentance that our baptism candidates promise in their solemn decision. Turning from abusing God’s creation to true care for our planet. That means taking radical, comprehensive and corporate action, and do so right now. At St Paul’s we can lead by example. We have switched our entire energy supply to renewable resources, and have put in place measures to reduce our total energy use, such as replacing all our lights—internal and external—with LEDs. Other churches are using their roof-spaces to harvest solar power. But we also need action by political and industry leaders. Only if we act together, and swiftly, can we ensure that the small window we have to avoid irreversible damage to the planet does not close forever.

During the coming three months the physical world is being represented in St Paul’s. As a powerful sign of the old creation being enveloped by the new creation that Christ has forever proclaimed, and which is re-enacted daily in our worship in Word and Sacrament. As a powerful sign of the promises we make as Christians to turn from our past destructive behaviours and to believe and follow God’s will for us, and for this world. As a powerful reminder of how greatly God loves this world—fragile and beautiful—that he took on its dust as a mantle and gave himself for it, so that we might have life forever. The reward for this gospel living, for our becoming ‘dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus’ is this very planet as our eternal home; living our lives to God, certain that sin and death have been defeated; strengthened by this message in our work to model that fundamental change in our own lives.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, we give you thanks that by your death you defeated death forever,
and by your rising to life showed us a new way of living:
sustain us by the power of your Spirit to reject selfish living,
and instead to live for you, and those whom you send us to care for;
enable us by your Spirit to stop exploiting this earth
you promise us as our eternal inheritance,

and instead to live in reverence and care for your creation;
equip us by your Spirit to proclaim this good news to others,
so that all might believe and the world might be saved,
for you are alive and reign, with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.