

12th April 2020



Welcome to Easter Sunday

The journey to new life

"Χριστός ανέστη!" **Christos Anesti**
"Ἀληθῶς ανέστη!" **Alithos Anesti**

A Call to worship

*God will repair what has been shattered,
but not by mending it with something else.
Rather, out of the old, and very same
material as its origin, God will impart to it
an appearance of beauty pleasing to God's
own self.*



Hilary of Poitiers

*God of life and light,
I thank you for another new beginning.
For the light shining through my window
For the trees and their colours
The birds and their songs
Though I am, for some days, alone
The beauty I see speaks your presence
And gives me confidence to live this new day.*

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington

Hymn: 'Christ the Lord is risen today' - *The Mormon Tabernacle choir*

Prayers

Risen One, come to meet me in the garden of my life.
Lure me into elation.
Revive my silent hope.
Coax my dormant dreams.
Raise up my neglected gratitude.
Entice my tired enthusiasm.

Give life to my faltering relationships.
Roll back the stone of my indifference.
Unwrap the deadness of my spiritual life
Impart heartiness in my work.

Risen One, send me forth as a disciple of your unwavering love,
a messenger of your unlimited joy. Resurrected One, may I become ever
more convinced that your presence lives on, and on, and on, and on.
Awaken me! Awaken me!

(Joyce Rupp, A Liturgy for Easter Sunday, David Poultney)

The 'Abba' Prayer:

Holy Being,
whom we call by many different names,
Blessed are you.
Blessed are we in you.
May we create with you a realm of mercy, peace and justice.
May love be done in the here and now as it is in the infinite.
May we share life in bread and hope.
For our failures to love, we need forgiveness.
May we find the paths of reconciliation.
In the midst of evil's every incarnation,
From the powers that possess our spirits and our structures,
May we find liberation.
In the power that is love, we seek to live and move and have our being.
May it be so, now and forever.

(Nancy L Steeves)

Song: "Lord's Prayer in Swahili"

A Prayer of confession

When our faith stands at the grave,
grieving for a stone that's rolled away, forgive us.
When our faith is short of understanding
though the truth is there to see, forgive us.
When our faith, beset by doubt,
sees no further than an empty tomb, forgive us.
For when we were walking in darkness:

you were there, you were there.
When we were kneeling in weakness:
you were there, you were there.
When we drew near feeling worthless:
you were there, you were there.
When we were needing forgiveness:
you were there, you were there.
When we were searching for your grace:
you were there, you were there.
Grant us, good Lord,
the faith to believe

(A faith for today... a moment together, Easter Sunday 12 April 2020)

Readings: Luke 24:1-9 (NRSV)

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

Galatians 2:19-20 (NRSV)

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Reflections *A Journey to New Life!*

Luke 24:5 "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.

1. We are, to put it mildly, going through historical times. The happenings of the last few weeks, and the potential path before us, have sharpened our sense of life awareness.
 - The Earth is a small place
 - We are not alone, there other people and community groups
 - We are all equally vulnerable (if it can happen to Prince Charles...)
 - We are all dependent on each other in more ways than we ever realized.
2. That all this should occur over the time of Lent and Easter (as well as other faiths such as the Jewish feast of Pesach/Passover) I find very serendipitous. No matter of station, wealth, competency, power or importance can keep one from contracting this dis-ease. The thought and possibility of death has burst through our thin armour of self-confidence adding to the eternal questions posited by life.
3. Again, somewhat serendipitously, we have begun this Lenten season with the theme of Jesus walking to his death in Jerusalem accompanied by his disciples. They are slowly striped of all confidence and bravado as they come to realise the truth, articulated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and pastor who was hanged in a Nazi concentration camp who said, *"When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."*
4. Against this background we have now Easter and the Resurrection. Where does this all fit in? I believe that it does not benefit us to endlessly argue the historic veracity of Jesus' resurrection – the truth is that there was no one there who actually saw it happen. What is of infinitely more value is the observance of the effect of what(ever) happened on his followers. They were transformed and galvanised, they found courage, skill in speaking, performed miracles and continued to pursue what they knew to be true – despite the Caesar's and Pontius Pilate's of the world. In short they were new

(resurrected?) people! A cursory look at the book of Acts of the Apostles is proof of this.

5. One of my favourite authors, Richard Rohr, says *“All great spirituality is about what we do with our pain. Death and resurrection are lived out at every level of the cosmos, but only one species thinks it can avoid it—the human species”* Resurrection will always take care of itself, whenever death is trusted. It is the cross, the journey into the necessary night, of which we must be convinced, and then resurrection is offered as a gift.
6. Richard has a unique talent for leading people into the mature path of their own development. He has studied many of the ‘initiation’ rights of communities around the world and has distilled their thinking into ‘growth lessons’ that young men are forced to confront as they make their way into mature adulthood. He speaks of *“Reality initiating us”* into growth, *“If we do not transform our pain, we will transmit it in some form.”*

Lesson One: **Life is hard**

Lesson Two: **You are not important**

Lesson Three: **Your life is not about you**

Lesson Four: **You are not in control**

Lesson Five: **You are going to die**

7. These may seem like very brutalizing truths to our western minds, trained by so much of our culture to seek the pleasure principle, to avoid anything too hard or strenuous, or that doesn’t give ‘value for money’. Most Westerners no longer tolerate it when their small selves are ignored, subverted, or humiliated, and get into a huff and storm away. Consider the great teachers through the millennia, the Prophets, Jesus, Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther King. they did not allow personal slights to derail their message. When we are willing to be transformed, we stop wasting time theorizing, projecting, denying, or avoiding our own ego resistance. But come to realize the bigger picture – *“Life is not about us, but we are about life.”* We are part of

this exciting cosmic adventure of God. After this epiphany, things like praise, gratitude, and compassion come naturally—like breath.

9. 'Take control of your life' is another mantra often repeated in our self-confident appointed universe, it even sounds mature and spiritual. It is the fundamental message of nearly every self-help book, and yet as we age, we become aware of the lessons that are learnt by letting go of the need to be right and in control. Learning that we are not in control situates us correctly in the universe of creation. Events such as OVID-19 and its indiscriminate suffering have shown the limits of human 'control'. This understanding is echoed in all mystical writings and passed down by sages and prophets of all faiths is emphasised by Jesus in his words and actions in the events of Jerusalem.
10. These teachings seem harshly negative but they are not complete! They are what humanity has garnered by way of wisdom and hard lessons, but Jesus goes much further than the wisdom of this world. He adds the transformative element, the one that leads us to the resurrection offered at the hands of a grace-filled God.
 - a) It is maybe true that life is hard, yet as Jesus says "*...my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28)*". If our religion has no deep joy and no inherent contentment about it, then it is not the real thing. If our religion is primarily fear of self, the world, and God; if it is principally focused on meeting religious duties and obligations, then it is indeed a hard yoke and heavy burden. But for countless people, even if their theology and doctrine may need to be tweaked, the fruits of the spirit -Love, joy, peace compassion, gentleness etc. are very real and meaningful experiences of the presence of God.
 - b) It is may be true that we are not important in the grand scheme of things, yet as Jesus reminds his disciples "*do you not know that your name is written in heaven?*" (Luke 10:20). The words of Jesus are of great comfort. he reassures us that we live not only in a moral universe but one that is constantly evolving and growing, where all death is transformed to life! That we are in the hands of such a God who has given us the spirit, invited us to be part of this vast undertaking, to be co-workers in the vineyard, to be like Jesus! I am

reminded of that great passage of Paul in Romans 8:31 *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

- c) It is maybe true that our life is not about us, yet as Paul declares *“I live now not my own life, but the life of Christ who lives in me (Galatians 2:20)*. If there is a single shortcoming in modern Christianity it is this. We have failed to make contact with the resurrected Christ within us. Paul speaks to the early Church from his conviction that... *“the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27*
- d) It is maybe true that we are not in control, yet as we are reminded by Jesus – *“can any of you, for all of your worrying, add a single moment to your span of life? (Luke 12:26)*. One actually has to read the entire passage (Luke 12:22-32). The toe of Jesus is much like that of a father or mother addressing anxious and fearful children. He is loving and gently chiding them to trust in this God of love. How I wish we could convey this to the world at this time.
- e) It is maybe true that we are going to die, but as Paul reminds us *“neither death nor life. . . can ever come between us and the love of God” (Romans 8:38-39)*. Perhaps on a mystical plane we may be closer to understanding the point of the journey. The love of God in Jesus may have driven Jesus to Jerusalem and comforted and directed his life to the cross, but it is this ‘truth’ that also took him to the tomb and beyond. Who implanted him as the universal Christ of life (Colossians 1:15-20).
12. Our text for this morning - *Luke 24:5 “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”* Asks a relevant question, why do we ‘look’ for God among the dead? Is not the resurrection about bringing, giving Gods life to bear upon creation? Of caring and sharing, loving and guiding, of joy and sorrow in the emotions given us? Jesus once talked about the fact that he came not to ‘steal life’ but to give it in abundance!

Christ is risen – he has risen indeed!

A prayer for the times....

God of Love, we turn to you with prayerful hearts
and confidence in your loving presence in every moment of our lives.
We stand before you as a people of hope,
trusting in your care and comforted by your love.
Fill us with compassion and concern for each other
in such challenging times: the vulnerable, the young and the old.
May your example heal us of our fear and give us
the courage we need to go to the margins.
Bring healing to those who are sick;
be with their families and neighbours.
We pray especially for those who are isolated,
that they may know your love.
Stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.
Accompany all those who serve with such love
and generosity in our healthcare facilities.
We give thanks for their continued work;
bless them, strengthen them and guide them
with your abundant goodness.
Guide our leaders and governance;
that they may make the right decisions for the wellbeing of all.
God of creation and God of life,
we place ourselves and our world in your protection and love.
May your peace be with us and enfold us today, tomorrow and always.

(Bishop Larry Duffy, Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference)

Closing song 'Now the green blade rises' (Noël Nouvelet)

Words of Blessing.

Whatever the origins of love we know it is our only hope.
It lies at the heart of Easter which shows us how to live.
So let us each day make love our song.
Let it work its transforming power in us.
We cannot do this alone – and that is love's first lesson. Amen

(Jill Harris)