

EASTER 2026

It is one of the most accomplished costume dramas I have seen on TV! I am still deeply immersed in it. 'The Other Bennet Sister' is a brilliant actress and the latest scene I watched, sees Mary's primary suitor 'land' on her grand home where the other nosey sisters and tyrant of a mother, get very excited... by the potential match Mary could make with Mr Tom Hayward. He is a lawyer and, has many of the same qualities as your Rector: handsome, charming, kind, and yes, someone who loves poetry – which Mary clearly, is bemused by.

You can easily imagine Mr Hayward reading the second part of this famous poem, 'Easter', by George Herbert, the words of which were thought to have been set to the lute in the 17th century:

1. "I got me flowers to straw thy way; I got me boughs off many a tree:

But thou wast up by break of day,
And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.

2. The Sunne arising in the East, Though he give light, & th'East perfume; If they should offer to contest With thy arising, they presume.

3. Can there be any day but this,
Though many sunnes to shine endeavour?
We count three hundred, but we misse:
There is but one, and that one ever.

This day for Herbert and for us is so definitive and life-changing because the Risen Christ has gloriously conquered death for ever. He no longer needs spices at his tomb or gifts of any kind, because this moment defined and transformed human history. Alleluia! Is it no wonder that the Church across the world, can say confidently that **every** Sunday is an Easter one, celebrating the new life and hope of Resurrection, something promised to you and me for our future as

Christ's followers, disciples, and lovers of God. In Anthony Hopkin's autobiography, he calls this 'wishful thinking' as many people do, but I call it instead 'faithful thinking'... to encourage and inspire us to see hope for the local, as well as international, communities of Christian worship and belonging. Twice, we hear the words in today's Gospel, 'Do not be afraid.' Which is why, last night, in our first celebration of Easter, we made a huge, joyful noise when the Gloria began!

As I heard Rowan Williams say recently, the main task of **any** Church is simply to be a place where the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is announced. It is the place where the bishop's ministry is grounded - and the bishop is there to tell us that the ministry of the first apostles as witnesses of the Resurrection is still continuing.

It is a place where beauty and imagination are nourished, so that people can see something of how the Resurrection makes the world new. It is a place where the local community – whatever the beliefs of individuals – can find room for their hopes, anxieties and celebrations, recognising at some level that the Resurrection opens doors of possibility and enlargement for everyone around. And this is why over recent years I have willed that both churches in our Benefice renew their facilities for outreach - which can speak to our generation and the next about this 'opening of doors'.

Here is a place of festival where the whole of the human heart can find itself at home around the fire that burns in the abiding presence of Christ and his Spirit – in the sacraments of divine welcome and in the warmth of human hospitality. This doesn't mean we have to become a 'doughnut' church, as a good, cynical friend of mine said to me; he's referring to a cafe church or, a 'crafty communion' church which I also saw advertised recently. That's all about entertainment (Blue Peter-style), rather than serious animation by Word and Sacrament. That's all about saying, 'we are really modern here' so we don't have to address the difficult, adult issues of the day.

For me, **that's** wishful thinking, to suggest that 'speaking out' or prophecy has no place in our spiritual lives. This is what American Pope, Leo XIV said at the beginning of Holy Week on Palm Sunday:

"Jesus is the King of Peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them." He also warned against idolatry: "It is a gift of grace that makes people children of God, brothers and sisters to one another. This gift sheds light on our present; for the wars that stain it with blood are the fruit of the idolatry of power and money."

In the coming weeks of the Easter season, each Sunday will reflect on a different Gospel 'station' or story of the Resurrection. You will not find in any, references to Jesus' doubters, accusers or killers. You will not find any sense of revenge or bitterness. No looking back by Jesus but only forward: "I AM the Resurrection and the Life" are words which speak of Jesus' continual offering of abundant life to us and the world, for our every today and tomorrow.

I want to return to my heroine, Mary Bennet. Despite being put down continually by her so-called 'nearest and dearest', of being told she is not beautiful or talented (when she is both of these things), she somehow manages to keep strong and to just grit her teeth and find the twinkle of a smile when most of us would just give up! Of course that's what Jane Hadlow's novel intended: to see how a human person's life **can grow**, be changed and transformed. Again, for Mary, there's no acrimony or nostalgia, in looking back. That for me, is also what Bishop John Taylor is saying in the quotation on the front of your service sheets. The test of being an 'Alleluia people' is to sing out that song of change and transformation which we call 'the trumpets of salvation', the continuing redemptive love of God which is unchanging, eternal.

A happy and blessed Easter to you all!
AMEN.

