

EASTER SUNDAY: 22

There's a lot going on in today's wonderful Gospel Reading! And from the beginning, there are clear clues about why the Church across the globe wants to make special efforts, as we did locally and ecumenically, in Elmhurst Park on Good Friday, and again here, on Palm Sunday. We want to say, declare, and shout out and sing: the Lord who travelled on a colt through Jerusalem and then died outside the city walls, is now RISEN! Good Friday was indeed GOOD because without it, Easter could not dawn and break out into our fractured world for God's healing, for God's grace, for God's gift of transforming and, redeeming love.

Like many of you gathered here today, I had hoped that this might be our first uninterrupted Holy Week without masks, without the latest Covid-19 variant, but alas, that wasn't to be. We stagger on and around such difficult times, not least against the backdrop of the harrowing war and devastation in Ukraine. I have to say proudly – there are so many prospective hosts throughout Suffolk urging to help, wanting to help, even if it means a thunderbolt is needed through the Home Office: to make the noises of our welcome for refugees and victims of war heard? This is not a time for bureaucratic form-filling and continual delays anymore. Our Easter Faith is a dynamic faith which understands the horrors of all terrorism, corrupt powers and dominions, and yes, crucifixion – which need to be overturned. Resurrection dawns!

I have always been fascinated, haven't you, by the detail of the Gospel writers' attention to the last days of Jesus especially his 'kangaroo trial' and conviction by the powers that be? Pontius Pilate's name was even called out through the centuries and is still marked today, in the Nicene Creed, which we have learnt to say by heart. And yet, our Risen Lord never went back to his accusers and never said what he could have said in vengeance or triumph: 'I told you so!' No,

today's Gospel backdrop and evocative scene moves from the empty tomb to that life-changing encounter between Mary and the person she mistook to be, someone like Alan Titchmarsh, the celebrity gardener. (Much as we may love Alan, he is English, and so that may not be a helpful analogy). So this mistaken identity (I now want to say Shakespearean moment) was actually about Jesus, the Jew, who had been the best Teacher and friend to his closest followers – the One who calls each of us by our name – to love, follow and serve Him. This is the Lord who leads us to our living God, who cannot be tied to nationality, gender, or even temporality.

For more weeks than I can remember, we have been using the famous prayer of St Richard of Chichester to invite those who are unable to join us in person, and watching us by livestream, to make their spiritual communion at home. That's all to do with our Gospel today and the sacramental heart of the Church's teaching: to understand the link and the bond of our Risen Lord calling and speaking to each of us personally – "I have called you by your name, you are mine" as Isaiah prophesied. The context of these words was not just to cheer us up or even to reassure us (although both emotions are deeply felt). The context was to come out of slavery and discover the Promised Land; to come out of darkness and oppression and discover new, glorious light and liberation; to come out of any mistaken identity into a deep and profound relationship of love, commitment, and what CS Lewis famously described in his autobiography as being 'Surprised by Joy'.

When Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' The voice, the name, the language, the recognition and the reassurance are all there and intimately bound – so much so, that Mary wanted to reach out and touch and kiss her Lord and ours. A bit like that moment we share each week at the Peace, a 'virtual' suspended moment, if you like, in time and out of time – a wave, a bow, a smile, but still at a distance and, I guess,

‘animated’ rather than for real. How we long to get back to normal and how we long to be less Anglican and formal in our conventions and demeanour and outlook. I tease perhaps, but I also challenge what Jesus challenged in the Garden of Gethsemane: not to fall asleep, not to be disinterested or complacent but instead, alive, to Christ’s calling us today, believing in us today, and wanting us to make a difference - in a world of indifference and unbelief.

I am no Evangelical but I believe in evangelism, if that means keeping the rumour of God alive, and growing in God, whether that is in Elmhurst Park or Canary Wharf or somewhere closer to you. Easter is everything about discovery, new life, and growth – even if that means letting go of old, familiar ways and old, familiar props. All of these possibilities and hopes for today and tomorrow originate from the rubble of Calvary and God’s desire for us to become a new and blossoming Garden of Eden, which we are invited to cultivate and enjoy. But first we have to say ‘No’ to sinful exploitation and greed and war anymore and choose instead our own ‘Yes’ to the green and kinder ways of ‘Resurrection’ to really hear the call of Our Risen Lord, his calling us by our name:

To open the gates of paradise here on earth and let the oppressed go free! To share and make known the Alleluia moments, instead of hiding them. To make Christ alive to the stranger as well as our nearest and dearest. To be an Easter People here in Woodbridge.

Happy Feasting, and every Blessing to you all!
AMEN.

