

God scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts, puts down the mighty, sends the rich away with empty bellies. Or we could remember Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, which speaks not only of blessing, but also of woe: woe to the rich, to those with full bellies, to those to whom the world is kind. I don't think Jesus is wishing those people ill. This is a prediction, not a wish. Hierarchies of riches and power are simply in the way. They must be swept away, so as to enable the triumph of mercy, love and justice.

All this is not complex or subtle or hard to understand. It's clear, simple; rather stark.

I began by speaking about the joy of Easter. The Resurrection is indeed a source of all the joy that echoes through the universe. But I am afraid that we often cut ourselves off from that joy, by making Easter small. Easter changes everything... but perhaps we want it to change everything while most things to stay the same. The basics of life are not up for negotiation. So our day just becomes nice – a nice service, some chocolate, nice time with family and friends – and next week we go back to the grind. The joy wears off.

I invite you to let today be different. Invite God to use this feast day as the first pebble in a land-slide in your life; as a small snowball sent rolling down a long snowy slope.

Take stock of your life.

Identify where you prioritise self-interest over the rules of the Kingdom – in how you use your time and your money.

Consider how you are seen, and how you want to be seen. Jesus chose definitively to be on the side of those with little social status, money or power, and that choice is vindicated in the Resurrection. What, in turn, do you choose? Do you seek out as friends those with whom Jesus stands? Do you share your life with them? Do you want to be seen as one of them? The King is risen; the Kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus has done everything for us. What He asks from us in return, is to stand with Him, trust Him, walk with Him.

Jesus Christ is Risen... He is risen indeed, alleluia!

HOLY WEEK IN THE TIME OF CRISIS— *Easter Sunday – Vindication of the King*

"Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!" begins one of the canticles that we only use at Easter, the Exsultet. And to you also I say, "Rejoice!"



Happy Easter!

Why do we rejoice today? What has the death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus achieved? In short: everything. Everything we need for peace and reconciliation, for a purposeful life, for a quiet heart and loving relationships, for a calm transition into eternal life.

I have given a series of talks this week entitled 'Holy Week in the Time of Crisis', recognising that this is a time when many of us feel deeply unsettled and vulnerable, and when the whole world seems to be tipping into chaos. So let me also ask the question the other way around: from what are we saved by the Cross and the empty tomb?

I suggest you spend some time thinking for yourself, from what do you need to be saved? How people think about salvation might depend on what they sense threatens them and, in my experience, this is not the same for different

people. Some fear death, and celebrate Jesus' being raised as the first fruit of a general resurrection. Some fear their own conscience, and celebrate above all that Jesus has borne for them any punishment that might be due for their sins. Some fear losing a sense of meaning and purpose, and celebrate our risen Lord as victor in a moral combat - a battle against evil and for the good, that we also can join. Some fear that they personally might not matter to anyone, and rejoice that God loves them enough to give His only Son for them. If you were the only person in the world, Jesus would still have died for your sake.

From all these things we are saved. All this is true. But it is also abstract, and can easily become an evasion. Some people need to be saved from more tangible evils. What about the need to be saved from poverty; from sexual abuse; from injustice; from discrimination? Does our idea of salvation extend to these things? Are we in fact saved from all of the evils that threaten us, or only the intangible ones?

I have spoken over this week about how the Cross and Resurrection are the fulfilment of all that Jesus said and did during His earthly ministry. Which is to say, they are about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom (of God, or of Heaven, which means the same thing), is Jesus' main theme, particularly through the first three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. In the fourth, John's gospel, He less often uses the phrase - but if we understand the Kingdom as meaning God's rule and presence coming to earth, with Jesus as the King, then the theme is even more clearly explored by John than in the first three gospels. In all four, Jesus is clearly the King, and salvation is about His sovereign rule.

The Resurrection, which we celebrate today, vindicates and completes Jesus' work on Good Friday. On the Cross, Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom and, once and for all, defined its character. What does Jesus teach us and show us about the Kingdom?

First, that the Kingdom is about the King. The King's choices define the Kingdom.

Second, that the King is not elsewhere, but stands before you and expects your allegiance. The Kingdom is not about some future abstraction, but is about now. It's about here, where we live. Jesus tells no Kingdom stories about harp-playing sat on clouds wearing nighties. Jesus' stories about the Kingdom are about ordinary stuff: about weeds growing through tarmac, or cooking, or housework; about being taken by surprise; about lives being

turned topsy-turvy upside down by the action of God. They are about the place where you and I live.

The third thing Jesus shows us is that the Kingdom is not about glory. The Kingdom is defined by the King, and He instead chooses solidarity with the poor, the outcast, the cursed and persecuted. This is what Jesus taught - the poor being raised up and the powerful cast down - and this is the side King Jesus chose, once and for all, on Good Friday.

The Cross and Resurrection are a definitive declaration that God is on the side of the outcast and poor, and that self-giving love is the only legitimate sovereignty. We invited to make the same declaration in our own lives - that is to say, to live as if this were true.

The Cross and Resurrection therefore call us to change our lives, and to live in a particular way. We are faced with a new reality, and an invitation to adapt to this new reality. The invitation comes with an incentive - life will be better if we do adapt to reality - and a warning, that things will go badly for those who do not. There is no way we can opt out of the change - it is coming whether we like it or not - but we are given a period of time within which to adapt.

This not a message about nice behaviour; in fact, it is not in the first instance about ethics or behaviour at all. It is about power, and change, and a coming state of reality.

What does it look like, to live and behave as a citizen of the Kingdom? Jesus teaches that God gives status and priority to the poor, hungry, sick, lame, despised, excluded: the people human kingdoms treat as the scum of the earth. The hungry will be fed, the poor enriched, those who weep will laugh, the excluded will be given a seat of honour. Jesus taught this, and showed it in His own actions. And then He ratified His teaching by the manner of His chosen death: in undergoing a slave's death, an outcast's death, humiliation and pain, He finally and definitively sided with the scum of the earth. For the poor, this is wonderfully good news. The Kingdom is where they find acceptance, where they are fed and clothed and healed, where they are forgiven and re-integrated into God's people. This is God's kingdom, a wonderful, hopeful vision of justice, mercy and joy.

And what about everyone else? What about the powerful and rich? Well, Mary's Magnificat also describes the Kingdom of God, when she sings that