

Sermon by the Revd Canon Derek Tansill
Fifth Sunday of Easter, Mattins (20.05.2019)

The resurrection is the first article of the Christian faith and the demonstration of all the rest said Michael Ramsey. Think of those words. Once again our gospel reading tells of Jesus' resurrection because everything we know as Christians is dependent on that event - resurrection. No wonder Paul is moved to say **If Christ was not raised then your faith is futile**. The cross is part one of the story but it is part two, the resurrection, which dominates everything and the whole of the NT throbs with the conviction that Jesus was raised by God and is alive for evermore.

I love watching politicians being interviewed on TV because they are so clever at dodging the questions – even starting their answers by saying 'I'm so glad you asked me that' when they have no intention of answering it and drown it with a flood of irrelevancies. Now the NT isn't like that – far from dodging difficult questions or awkward facts, it thrusts them into the very forefront of our awareness. Whatever mood of depression or doubts about God you'll find it all there in the Bible. We do not honour God by pretending to a faith we do not have or have only spasmodically, or by asserting things we don't really believe. Peter denied Jesus; Thomas doubted his resurrection. Mary and the other women we are told in today's NT reading were astonished. Even that great reformer Martin Luther is reported to have said 'I was driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished I had never been born. Love God? I hated him'. And Paul faces up to the big question of death and says 'Now if Christ is not raised. It is a question we must face. What if Christ was not raised? What if we have no hope of life after death? What if we never see our

loved ones again? What if wickedness triumphs in the end? What if the whole of Christian history is built upon an illusion? If Christ was not raised then evil is stronger than good, darkness stronger than light; and death is stronger than life and death will prevail.

We need to read again and again the accounts in the gospels – accounts which have their differences just like the witness of honest people always is – but they are all agreed that Jesus rose from the dead and was seen by them. Furthermore, the old fear which they had, completely disappeared and that small group of believers became a formidable missionary force. Something had given them astonishing new life and hope and they knew full well what that something was – it was that each one of them had met with and spoken with their risen Lord, and that was the message which they proclaimed. But there is more.

The risen Christ has evidenced himself in the lives of countless people since and their testimony is impressive. From the great saints over the centuries to people around us today we hear voices declaring that they know Christ to be alive and living in them. Each one of us can know that same experience – that we live in him as he lives in us. We are all of us in touch with the same reality – with the same Lord who spoke to those disciples in the upper room.

What does it mean for us today? Jeremiah testifies to the blessing known to the person who trusts in the Lord and has confidence in him. He does not fear. And the fact of the resurrection of Jesus challenges our world view today. The Easter message is a challenge to secularism and materialism proclaiming that this is God's world and that it is his values which matter. Of course, we find materialism infectious. The delights

of secular society are very appealing and modern technology does seem to meet so many of our needs and our desire for comfort and leisure. Perhaps we are tempted to feel that we've never had it so good. But then look at the reality of our society – the erosion of values and moral standards – the demeaning of human dignity and the sanctity of human life., all showing that so much of our civilisation is a veneer hiding so much viciousness and despair and misery.

Now the Easter story calls the whole Church back to identify uncompromisingly with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It may seem foolishness to many and a stumbling block to others but lose the resurrection hope and all is lost. Secondly, the fact of the resurrection proclaims that Christ is alive and this challenges each one of us and should make a difference to our world view – the way we see and treat people and also the way we view God. With countless saints through the ages we will be able to unite in exclaiming with St Paul **The truth is – Christ has been raised from the dead.**