

Sermon: Mattins: 26<sup>th</sup> May 2019

By the Revd Alison Green, Chaplain of the University of Chichester

May I speak in the name of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit

*The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.*

Words from today's psalm

Which pretty much

sum up today's readings

Because today's readings are full of joy

The joy of unexpected restoration

Of God's intervention in human history

The joy of salvation

These are the themes of the Easter season

Although,

And maybe this is just me

Easter day feels a long time ago

But the lectionary

Today takes us back

To the dawn of Easter day

That moment when the Eastern horizon lightens

And the shadows are clear and long

Takes us back to two women  
Coming to see the tomb  
And being present as an angel of the lord  
Causes an earthquake  
By rolling back the stone

And in a surprisingly domestic touch  
Where cosmic forces are involved  
The angel rolls back the stone  
And sits on it

Now I don't know how you imagine angels  
But clearly they are terrifying  
Why else would they say  
'do not be afraid'  
As a conversation opener?

in these words  
Matthew takes us back  
to the beginning of his Gospel  
to Joseph's dream  
where the angel of the Lord  
appears and tells him

'Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife  
for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.  
She will bear a son,  
and you are to name him Jesus,  
for he will save his people from their sins'

Matthew takes us back  
to the incarnation  
to the place of God's direct intervention  
to save and restore creation

Today's first reading  
Is also about joy  
And about loss and restoration

The prophecy of Zephaniah  
Is a short book  
Only three chapters long

Zephaniah wrote his prophecy  
At a time when Judah  
Was in chaos  
The northern kingdom  
Had fallen and its people  
had been deported  
the rulers of Judah  
have turned from worshipping the lord  
to idolatry

worshipping the gods  
of the Ammonites  
and of the Canaanites  
indifferent towards their covenant lord

The prophecy of Zephaniah  
starts with a threat  
a threat of global destruction  
indeed of cosmic destruction

‘I will utterly sweep away everything  
from the face of the earth, says the Lord.

That day will be a day of wrath,  
a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of ruin and devastation’,

In the nature of prophetic writing  
There is a faithful remnant of the people  
The few people who remain faithful to God

and this allows God  
to restore and transform the nation  
leading to the song of joy  
we heard this morning

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;  
shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter Jerusalem!

The idea of a nation  
Where the rulers have lost their way  
Probably resonates with us today  
In the confusion of domestic politics

As we wait for the results of the European elections  
As we wait for a sense of what our relationship  
With Europe,  
Our nearest neighbours  
will be in the future

but before we become overwhelmed  
by a vision of chaos  
like that of Zephaniah

It is worth remembering  
That the reality of Easter  
Is the opposite of a prophesy  
Of cosmic destruction

The reality of Easter  
is the reality of cosmic transformation  
where heaven is visible on earth  
in the presence of angels  
and of the mystery and joy  
of the resurrection

a cosmic transformation  
experienced by those who had known Jesus  
As a series of intimate personal meetings

The joy and reality of Easter  
The mystery of the Christian faith

Is that Jesus  
the Saviour of the world  
Continues to be present in word and sacrament

And that restoration is waiting for us  
And for our nation  
when we  
like the women at the tomb  
proclaim Jesus as Risen Lord

And work for his kingdom  
Of love and justice  
In our personal and public lives

The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.

Alleluia