

Easter Day Mattins 2019

Luke 24: 1-12

If I had asked you last week in the Cathedral on Palm Sunday how you expected the week to proceed as we set out to follow Jesus on the way of his cross, you could probably have told me, and you would probably have been quite right. You would have described our pattern of worship, and perhaps what you could or couldn't take part in, and you would have looked forward to being in the Cathedral to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead today on this Easter Sunday. And for most of you, you would have been quite right.

For those who were hoping or expecting to celebrate the Easter Feast at Notre Dame in Paris today, the catastrophic fire which almost destroyed the Cathedral will have caused them to keep a very different Holy Week and Easter from that which they imagined and expected, either dispersed and worshipping elsewhere, or gathered around the Cathedral, burnt, damaged, broken, and offering prayer there.

Time does not allow me this morning to linger too much longer at Notre-Dame, except to note that when President Macron described Notre-Dame as 'our history, our literature, part of our psyche, a place of all our great events, our epidemics, our wars, our liberations, the epicentre of our lives'. As he promised that the Cathedral would be rebuilt, we hear an acknowledgement of the way in which the Christian Faith has been a constant influence through history, moulding the history and life of the nation, and a determination that it should continue to do so.

And for the Notre-Dame, the interruption in what it would normally expect to be doing gives an opportunity to consider afresh how it shapes its life, and that of its community and nation. Of course, new loss of a medieval Cathedral, sad though it is, is put into context sharply by the news overnight of the killing of 137 people and the injury to countless more in attacks on churches and hotels in Sri Lanka overnight. It is a sharp reminder to us of the cost of following the way of Christ, which for Christians in many places is very great.

Our prayers are for those who have died, and been injured, for those who love them, for the hospitals and emergency services, and for those who now minister to them, expressing enduring faith and hope in the resurrection of Jesus which we celebrate today, a profound interruption in often chaotic human lives and human history.

We have heard this morning St Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which begins with the word 'But.'

But what?

In terms of the thread of the story, which St Luke tells, the word 'but' marks an interruption in what might be expected to happen to a body at the time of burial. Jesus' broken body has been placed in a tomb. The women who accompanied Jesus from Galilee did not have time to

carry out the embalming of his body before the Sabbath, and so they simply prepared the spices for later. And on the Sabbath they rested.

‘But’ on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb with the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb but when they went in they did not find the body. Another interruption into what they expected to find and to do.

And the explanation of that is immediately offered to the terrified women, as two men in white ask: ‘Why do you look for the living, among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.’

Some years ago I took a pilgrimage to the Holy Land from my parish. On the day that we went to the church of the Holy Sepulchre, there was a huge queue of people wanting to enter the tomb where Jesus’ body is believed to have been laid. The queue became impatient and then disorderly – so disorderly that the authorities threatened to close it altogether.

The irony, of course, is that we were in a queue to see the one place where Jesus is not to be found, for ‘he is not here, but has risen.’

And we worship him here today as we celebrate that he has risen, is risen, is risen and alive and amongst us. We will receive him later as the Eucharist is offered here, praying that ‘we who share Christ’s body (may) live his risen life; we who drink his cup (may) bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.’

The risen Christ is to be known and encountered in the life of the church and in the lives of those who he has transformed and is transforming, into his likeness from glory to glory. It is to be found in lives interrupted and disrupted by his call to follow him and lived joyfully in the risen life of Christ.

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed.

Alleluia.