

Easter Sunday Address 2020

Stephen Cotterell (the Archbishop of York Designate) in his recent article in the Spectator said:

'There is nothing good about this virus, but that does not mean that nothing good can come of it'.

If we were one of the first disciples, we might say the same of the crucifixion – there is nothing good about Jesus crucifixion. In just a few days the cries of 'Hosanna' had turned to 'crucify' and those amazed at Jesus healings called out for him to be wounded and beaten. The religious authorities were outraged by his audacious claims and the roman rulers willing to suspend the truth to keep the peace and secure their own positions, even his closest companions fearful for their own lives had deserted him. How could any good come of the brutal torture and horrific death of a man who had showed nothing but compassion, mercy, love and right living all his life? Afraid and grieving hiding in the upper room they would have been thinking - How can any good come from this?

I was reminded this Wednesday about the Great Exchange: On the cross Jesus takes what is rightfully ours (judgement and death) so that we might take what is rightfully his (righteousness and life). We are free and alive but he is dead. While we call the day Good Friday because we are forgiven, in Jesus death evil has triumphed and that is no cause for celebration. The gospels tell us that as Jesus died the sky turned dark for three hours in the middle of the afternoon, the temple curtain is ripped in two and the dead start to come out of their graves and haunt the people in the city, and there is an earthquake – complete horror movie stuff. This is complete chaos – the world has returned to how it was in the very beginning. It's as if the destruction of creation is complete. What started to be broken in the Garden of Eden is now complete – human sin was to turn and walk away from the source of life and begin the embrace of death and now it is complete: The darkness and chaos have returned. Can anything good come of it?

What seems like the end is actually the beginning, this confusion and darkness, this chaos and pain is the birth of a new humanity. Just like labour pains of childbirth- good can come out of it.

We studied Genesis in January, and you will remember the sequence of how God created the world:

In the beginning there was chaos, emptiness, void and darkness covered the earth,
and there was light,
Water covered the earth



and as the water was parted
new life sprang up on the earth.
Into this world humanity was placed and given life.
And God said it was good, very good!

On the morning of the third day
At the beginning while it was still dark in the chaos and emptiness of grief Mary, Peter and John went to the tomb, they find it empty and the grave clothes folded as if Jesus' body had just disappeared,
Peter and John rush back to tell the other disciples but Mary stays at the tomb.
Then Jesus, the word, speaks to her
and in the light of the dawn
through the veil of her tears
in a garden filled with signs of life
the resurrected Jesus appears to her – he isn't just brought back to old life like Lazarus where death still can have the victory, but he is risen to new life, where death has no power or hold on him.
And it was good, very good, more than good – beyond their, or our, wildest hopes and dreams – the new creation!!
This is not just good news – it is the best news – it is worth all our praises, all our halleluiahs, all our shouts of triumph this Easter morning!!

Paul writing his second letter to the church in Corinth tries to explain why this is such good news. He says in chapter 15:

¹ So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. ²² Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.

Or as C.S. Lewis said "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God."



We get new life – not the same life we had before – but a new life on this earth free from sin and the promise of eternal life after death. For those who are worried about the details Paul says we have 'Human bodies for this earth and spiritual bodies that can never die, for heaven'.

The resurrection is the good that comes out of the crucifixion: The new creation of life that is no longer bound by death. Isaiah prophesied that death would be swallowed up in victory with the taunt

⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?^[1]



Today we celebrate that 2000 years ago it was when Jesus rose from the dead that death no longer has any power over us.

But this year, this Easter Sunday in the face of a virus that is not good, and had changed our earthly lives beyond what could conceive of before, that has brought fear and darkness, chaos and confusion, we have hope: we need not fear death and can give our praise and thanks to God because as Paul says 'He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Amen

Rev Angie Smith
9th April 2020

Images:

Serpentine Cross, Mount Nebo, Jordan.

Reredos in the Franciscan Chapel, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.

Beach on north shore of the sea of Galilee, near Capernaum.