**SERMON FOR EASTER DAY | 04.04.2021**

**Isaiah 25: 6-9; Acts 10: 34-43; St Mark 16: 1-8**

**If it seems slightly strange to be in Church this Easter Sunday morning (it is, actually only three weeks since Mothering Sunday when a relative handful of us were back in St James’ after yet another lockdown for the baptisms of Ava, Ivy and Bella Wilson) then cast your minds back to last Easter when I was celebrating our Easter morning Parish Mass, recorded from my dining room table alongside the new Paschal Candle burning brightly as the sun shone through the windows from … Arlington Square!**

**In fact we could spend quite a few interesting minutes recalling all the strange events of this last year, the things we have had to learn to cope with like zooming - as well as those things we haven’t been able to do at all like getting our hair cut or staying overnight away from home.**

**So perhaps it isn’t surprising that the phrase that leaps out of the Easter Gospel this morning are the words *He is not here,* spoken by the angel sitting in the empty tomb. Of all the Covid-related experiences, not ‘being with’ people has been a kind of common denominator – and not one we have enjoyed very much.**

**And yet these words *He is not here* are not in the least bit gloomy. If Jesus had been there, it would only have been his broken body which the women would have been anointing. Instead they are faced with a very different situation and one they were not in the least bit ready to handle. What the angel was saying defied any rational explanation: he wasn’t ‘a missing person’; nor had his body been stolen. What they were being told was that he was *going ahead of them –* to their old stamping ground, the familiar sights and sounds of Galilee where he had made such an impact. And the two Marys and Salome were to tell the disciples to *go play catch-up*. Jesus was alive and active once more and instead of moping at home, they were to go and find him and see what he was up to next. *He isn’t here.***

**St Mark’s Gospel is by far the shortest of the four and perhaps that is why it simply fizzes with energy, especially at this point which was probably where the original version of the Gospel ended. We need to go to Matthew, Luke and especially John for all those familiar Resurrection stories. Mark leaves us here with the much more enigmatic: *He is not here.***

**So what do we make of all this? For those of you with a longish memory it is the famous sermon of Bishop David Jenkins and his remark that Resurrection is nothing to do with dead bones. Resurrection is the spiritual reality that the Jesus they saw crucified - on a particular Friday, at a particular Passover, in a precise spot outside the city walls of Jerusalem – is now a completely free agent, free of all limitations of place, time and resources.**

**Because Resurrection is not just about coming back to life. At least not coming back to the old life. St Mark wants to make one point and one point only: resurrection is about leaving everything familiar behind because from now on, all things are possible. Mark doesn’t have Jesus eating fish for breakfast or meeting with Mary Magdalene as in St John – events which are all part of our usual experience: we eat and we meet people all the time. St John’s message is a different one and we can look at that in another sermon.**

**No, what St Mark wants to point to is Jesus’ insistence that we too are to spend our lives *playing catch up*. Jesus is not here because Jesus is everywhere, not bound by conventions or limitations of space or time. Indeed *Jesus is going ahead to Galilee* is not even about Galilee; it is just ‘another place’, the place where we must go and find him and see what he is up to. Resurrection is about no place and every place; it is about the call for us to discover where Jesus’ next piece of the jigsaw is located.**

**For us, called to be the Easter people, the message could not be clearer – the pandemic has underlined it for us. Over this last year, without having any choice in the matter, our eyes have been opened to see in a new way the life we have been leading so relatively comfortably for years. What new insights have we discovered – about people, about what we own and the way we do things? When we can’t have something or do something, what have we learned?**

**In a similar way this Gospel story turns our thinking upside down. *He isn’t here* the angel tells the women. You can’t rely on the old certainties; they are no more. Customs, habits, old truths: they have all gone. But instead of just crying for what is no longer there, the angel says, go and see what new things are on offer. Follow Jesus *to Galilee* – wherever that ends up by being. And if you go there you will find him waiting for you, ready to show you, support you and love you. But stay where you are and none of that can happen…**

**In keeping with that, we follow now the ancient tradition of the Church at Easter, reaffirming our baptismal promises to follow Christ, wherever he leads: to be Resurrection people, uncertain of what the future holds but confident that whatever it is, God will not just see us through – as he has through this pandemic – but will enable us to flourish and to grow.**

**We are the Easter People. By God’s grace we have been called to proclaim his words and reveal his saving works in all those places where we live and work. Today we renew the promises made at our baptism so that we may bring God’s light to our troubled world and be ambassadors for his healing and life-giving love. So I ask:**

**Will you continue to be guided by the Holy Scriptures and the example of the apostles? Will you take your part in the life of this Christian community, sharing regularly in worship and in prayer?**

***With the help of God, I will.***

**Will you do all in your power to resist temptation, sin and evil wherever you find it, and whenever you fail, will you ask for help and return to the Lord?**

***With the help of God, I will.***

**Will you proclaim, by word and example, the good news that Jesus came to share?**

***With the help of God, I will.***

**Will you seek to serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself?**

***With the help of God, I will.***

**Will you affirm your belief that God is King, praying for his wisdom in all the decisions that you make? Will you pray for the world and its leaders and actively support those who are in need?**

***With the help of God, I will.***

**May Christ dwell in our hearts for ever, that we may be rooted and grounded in faith and hope and love. Amen.**