

Easter 2 Homily 19.iv.20

Today, the Second Sunday of Easter, has sometimes been known commonly as “Low Sunday”. That never used to sound quite right; the day also being the eighth day of resurrection, leading us on to new creation. But scholars think it probably came about as a contrast to the previous Sunday, Easter Day, with its “highest of high” Masses. It can be difficult for us to stay at the highest plane, to retain the pure joy of resurrection. Today’s service does try to stay in the heights as several of our responses are framed as thanksgivings for this new deed God has done in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

But, of course, we are still also in the depths as coronavirus deaths are peaking; as lockdown continues and, rather like the disciples in the upper room, doors are locked and hearts are afraid. Perhaps this year it is Low Sunday.

In this crisis, I have from time to time been taken back to the Book of Common Prayer as its spirituality is conscious of adversity and the fragility of life. In the Order for the Burial of the Dead, one exhortation begins: ‘man that is born of a woman has but a short time to live, and is full of misery,’ then shortly after contains the memorable and sobering phrase,

‘in the midst of life we are in death’.

This is “Low” spirituality indeed! But there is at least comfort in finding ancient words which speak into our situation; the Psalms also offer this same gift to us at this time.

At the same time, however, Easter is here. As the Queen said in her message, it isn’t cancelled, even though buildings are shut. Thus we just heard from newly-emboldened Peter on the Day of Pentecost:

‘But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.’

The Easter message of new life in Jesus Christ cannot be contained.

I was very touched by the Bishop of Southwark’s Easter Day eucharist. In his homily, he turned inside out the Prayer Book phrase; reflecting on Mary meeting Jesus in the garden, he declared “in the midst of death we are in life”.

In the darkest place, in the tomb of Jesus, life and light returned victorious.

Sharing spiritually in the communion led by the Bishop, I experienced the range of lows and highs, Good Friday and Easter. I could not physically receive communion; it was painfully close and yet so far. But ‘blessed are those who have not seen [or we should say tasted] and yet have come to believe.’

In these days I urge you afresh, with me, to receive spiritually the communion of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the eucharist, the death of Christ is proclaimed; in the eucharist, new creation enters the world and our hearts.

It may be Low Sunday, but it is also the Day of Resurrection when we hear,

“Peace be with you.”

Revd Mark Eminson