

Easter Day 2017

Why are we here this morning? Why is Easter good news? Why did we start this service with making a great big noise of joy and triumph and alleluia?

It is not just because Jesus Christ came back from the dead. That's a remarkable thing, if it's true, really remarkable and interesting – but not necessarily much to do with me and you.

It's not even because the resurrection shows us that after we die we can go to Heaven. Again, that's interesting, it's even important – but for more and more of us, it doesn't quite seem enough. There's a James Bond movie called *The World is not Enough*; well, for most people today *Heaven* is not enough. We have too many questions about this world: about dementia, about abuse, about North Korea to worry too much about the next. A Gospel that when you die you go to heaven might be true – I think it *is* true - but more and more of us have a basic instinct that says 'so what?'

Jesus didn't talk much about Heaven. He spoke rather of God's Kingdom, and if you were a first century Jew you knew what that meant. It meant Israel, and ultimately the whole earth, ruled as if God were the King, as if earth *was* Heaven, where God's will is done. It meant justice, and peace, and healing. It meant lepers being healed, and tax-collectors giving back their loot, and crippled, sick old women being able to stand up straight, to become once more daughters of Abraham. It meant an end to dungeon days, to all that crushed humanity, to being ruled by whoever had the biggest swords and armies. It meant that at last, love would win.

On Friday, the powers of darkness took all of that, they took Jesus, and beat him and mocked him and nailed him up on the cross. They put a sign over his head saying 'King of the Jews' to remind God's people where hope gets you, to sneer at the idea of any other kingdom than their own. Caiaphas and Pilate and all which stands behind them, all the powers of greed and fear and darkness which run deep in the world, unleash everything they have against Jesus. All the hate, all the violence, all the despair is poured in upon Him, concentrated on Him, to kill and destroy hope forever. They kill him. And they put him in a tomb with a great big stone over it. That stone says, 'hope is dead'.

And we are here this morning because just then, in that darkest night, when Pilate and Caiaphas and the princes of darkness sat back satisfied, when all was silence and grief – *something happened*. In the darkness, something stirred. *Love* stirred. It was as if a slow fire began to burn, a fire of love which could take all the hate and the violence and the darkness and began to turn them around. Its flames began to dance in the battered and bloodied body of Jesus, and they changed Him, changed Him into glory we cannot even imagine. And as the fire grew and grew, it pushed against the stone, till finally it surged around it and through it and out into the world, past the sleeping guards. It caught hold of the sad, battered hearts of the disciples, and it made *them* fire. And through them, to us and to the whole world. The fire is coming, and we will be changed. Love is coming, and we will be like Jesus.

That's Gospel. *That's* why we sing and shout and bang things. *That's* why we're here. On that Easter morning a fire was started which, please God, has touched us a little and one day will transform our whole world. It is a fire which says that there is simply nothing, *nothing*: no stupidity, no sin, no hurt, no failure, no darkness, that in the end will stand. *Love wins*. All the things that seem so impossible to us now: all the broken promises, all the deflated hopes, all the worst things we have done, *even, even* all the bodies that lie around us in the ground: in all of them, the fire will burn. In all of them, *Love wins*.

Now that is fantastically hard to believe. There are all sorts of hard questions to this faith, all sorts of problems. And we will face them as individuals, as a church, day by day, week by week, year by year. Sometimes, faith will seem very hard indeed. This sermon makes it sound easy, and it's not. But... today is the day we touch base. Today is the day when the problems, for once, take second place. When we remember that however big they are, Love is bigger, Love is stronger, Love is deeper and Love wins. Today is the day we let rip. The fire has been started, and will never, ever be put out. Love has won, death is dead, Christ has conquered.

And so we sing the victory song: right now, when we leave, for the rest of our lives. Alleluia, Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**