

Easter Day Festal Eucharist 2021

Sunday 4 April, 11.00 am

St Edmundsbury Cathedral

The Right Reverend Dr Mike Harrison

Bishop of Dunwich

Some years ago peace was established for a time in Colombia between the left wing guerrillas and the government, but some guerrilla fighters continued to live in the jungle with their guns, suspicious and afraid. No-one could work out how to get this lost generation to return to society. However, an advertising executive, Jose Sokoloff did work it out. In 2013 he met with mothers of the rebels, obtained pictures of the rebels as children, pictures the rebels knew must have come from their mothers – these along with other materials were dropped throughout the jungle at Christmastime, inviting the rebels to come home. And large numbers of them did. What Sokoloff had done was change the story the rebels were living by. Their story had been “I am an armed guerrilla, a wanted criminal, I must stay in the jungle.” Now it was “You are my child, come home for Christmas”. If you’re a wanted criminal you stay in the jungle, if you’re a wanted child, you return home.

We live by stories, hardly noticing that some of them are not only unhelpful but at odds with our Christian faith. For instance one story we tell ourselves is that I am a customer and the other person serves me, well or badly. The writer Scott Cormode gives the example of trying to get in touch with his internet provider when the service went down and how it took 5 long calls, by which time he was hacked off. So he was angry with the person he talked to – the fact she was just receiving the call and not a guilty party didn’t come into it – he was impatient and short with her. He was living the story of being a “customer” and the person on the phone wasn’t a human being made in the image of God but a representative of a company that had taken my money and served me poorly. To put it otherwise, the liturgy of commerce teaches us to be stereotypically annoyed customers, prickly about being poorly served.

Or again we can rehearse how we are in one way or another the victims of injustice. Look how I have been passed over, how my talents have been ignored, how my family treated me, or my school, my employer, my church, my spouse. And so we say, “why shouldn’t I be resentful”, “why shouldn’t I strike back, look what has been done to me”. That’s what we say, and we’ve all said it, and where does it lead us? If all the films idealising revenge these days are to be believed it leads to justice, but that’s a lie and we know it.

Or one final story – “I’m not like them”. We don’t have to scabble around in our minds too long to find someone or some group of whom we can say – now that’s beyond the pale, those really are the dregs, while I on the hand would never, could never, be like THAT.

Holy Week has some uncomfortable things to say about these stories that we inhabit. While we think we’re customers poorly served, Holy Week reminds us that the greatest of all servants, serving us by washing our feet and offering His life, was poorly served, by us. That while we may stew in the juices of being victims of injustice, the only entirely innocent human being shows us that we are in different ways implicated not as victims but victimisers of Him and the least of His brothers and sisters. And that while we might delude ourselves by setting a distance between

ourselves and the truly wicked, those revelling in Jesus' sadistic death, in fact we all find ourselves absorbed into that baying, heckling, murderous crowd.

But our Lord does not leave us there. The resurrection overlays these stories with a quite different scenario, a new liturgy and an invitation to be part of quite a different story, just like those Colombian rebels.

If for example the story you're telling yourself is "I've screwed everything up" then Easter has something to say to you. In our gospel, just two words to focus on. "And Peter". The angel at the empty tomb tells the women, "But go, tell His disciples *and Peter*, ..." Why did the angel add, "and Peter"? Because Peter needed to hear directly, needed to know directly, needed to appreciate directly that the Lord was returning, and not to give him hell but to love the hell out of him. Peter, who had miserably denied Jesus. Peter, who had boasted of his allegiance to Christ, Peter so sure of himself, so full of bluster and bravado, found out by a young maid at Caiaphas's house. If you've never failed, you don't need this message, if you've never fallen short, you can switch off, if you're just excellent, sorry for wasting your time. But if you've ever promised something to others, yourself or God but not realised it; if you've ever resolved to overcome some besetting vice, only to blow it repeatedly; if you're plagued with guilt over stuff that has defeated you; then, Easter is telling you despair does not have the last word, a new future has opened up and the dawn has come.

Or maybe the story you're telling yourself is "I'm alone, in the end I'm on my own and finally it's down to me in grim isolation". Well just one word for you from our gospel, "Galilee". "He is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him as he told you". Where's Galilee? Well it's where they lived, where they worked, where life happened. And that's where they'll find Jesus now.

The meaning of resurrection isn't just that God vindicates Jesus, important as that is;

it isn't just that Jesus conquers death, important as that is;

it isn't just that this lays up hope for us beyond our physical horizon, important as that is;

the meaning of resurrection is crucially that Jesus is **with us now** through the Holy Spirit. With us now, One who walks right up to us and listens to us as we pray, one waiting at the door of our heart for us to open up to His company, One who invites us to yoke ourselves to Him for our ease and well-being. Wherever Galilee is for you, the Risen Lord is already there, ahead of you, awaiting you.

Or maybe the story you're telling yourself is death is the end, so I better get my kicks before everything goes up in flames. Four words from the Gospel "He has been raised". Do we believe this? You know if resurrection is just a symbol then to be frank it can go to hell. If it's all sign or metaphor, forget it. If it's all about positive thinking, a celebration of rebirth, or new starts, then honestly you can keep your eggs and daffodils and cards.

Mark in his gospel doesn't seem to think resurrection is just a symbol. He names all sorts of people who've witnessed it – and the first readers of his gospel would've lived close by enough to go and ask them if it was true. Paul didn't think it was just symbolic either; When Paul writes in Philippians 1.21 "for me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" he is expressing an unstrained easy confidence about the continuity of his life and person founded on his experiences of God's world and Jesus'

place in it. Indeed Christianity truly believed is quite shocking to witness. As when Christians are willing to be beheaded on a beach by ISIS rather than be separated from the Lord Jesus. As when Korean Christians even now languish in jails for their faith. As when we begin to register this life is not about grabbing greedily at everything we can before we fade into oblivion, but just the beginning of being part of a completely different story from the one we thought we were in.

Easter tells us we're part of quite a different story from the one we thought we were in. It's time to put down our guns, to let go of our fear, and come home.