

*Sermon Preached by Revd Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

*Easter Day A*

*Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2020*

*Do not be afraid...He is going ahead of you.*

A few weeks ago there was a discussion amongst clergy online as to whether we should still celebrate Easter.

After all they said we are in a long lent with our church doors shut, our inability to worship together in the same way, the physical distancing and so many other changes to our lives in the light of the pandemic.

Why don't we wait until everything is back to normal and celebrate it then?

I think it is precisely now that we need to celebrate the raising of Jesus from the dead.

It is why we are Christians.

It is actually what we celebrate every Sunday – the raising of Christ from the dead. We preach Christ crucified and celebrate Christ Risen.

We believe in a God who says yes to us, yes to the self-offering of Jesus, who makes things new – that life can come through death.

The living Christ was raised from the dead to bring new life and hope from within the darkness and Christ is alive amongst us now and that nothing and no one is lost.

We are still being made alive now.

The light of Christ shines in the darkness and keeps shining.

Christ being raised from the dead means hope now that the power of death cannot extinguish.

We have experienced earthquakes during this time, upheavals in all our lives and yet in some ways we are the lucky ones, some of our pacific neighbours have literally had earthquakes and hurricanes.

In a way upheavals in life are more normal than we think.

Matthew's story of the raising of Jesus from the dead is vivid in detail with earthquakes and an angel rolling back the stone, appearance like lightning and guards shaking and becoming like the dead.

It is two women who have come by themselves who encounter all of this, the earthquake linking the death of Jesus and the raising to new life.

'Do not be afraid' are the first words spoken to them in the midst of this earthquake.

Do not be afraid, Jesus has been raised and goes ahead of you.

It is natural in these days to feel fear – life breaks everyone at some time or other and at the very least wears one down relentlessly.

So we all need to hear the reassurance in these words: "Do not be afraid" – God lives within us, and Jesus continues to go before us that we can accept whatever comes, knowing that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

Death does not have the last word – life does.

The light may flicker, the light may dim, but it keeps burning still, it sheds light in the dark places, hope in our desolation and peace in the midst of fear.

The women go with fear and great joy – the reminder that the experience of the risen Lord does not take away their fear, but enables them to keep faith *amid* their fears to share the good news. This is what courage looks like, the courage that Easter is about.

For God never promised that we would be always happy, but that God is both with us and for us at all times and in all circumstances.

Because of the Cross God is always where we need God to be. Because of the raising of Christ from the dead, light is stronger than darkness.

We will see Jesus. We will see Galilee because God Eastered in us, light in the midst of us.

Life is stronger than death, hope stronger than fear and that hope and love will prevail.

We are Easter people and alleluia is our song.

Even in these days we can sing Alleluia and find joy in God and each other.

The mystery of this time is that God continues to make new. We may not always see where or how it comes, but it is there before us.

Michael Casey has said this:

*In this time of crisis, we need to fortify our faith so that it finds its full flowering in a quietly confident hope.*

*Now is the time to renew our commitment to God, to deepen our trust, to strengthen our hope, and to give ourselves more generously to prayer.*

*We must move towards the realisation that whatever hardships lie in wait for us over the next few months, God will not desert us.*

*This also is a time of grace.*

*It can be for us and for all, a time of growth.*

*Let us pray that God will empower us all to pass from this dark place of difficulty and doubt to a living hope that exposes us all to the glory and power of the risen Christ.*

*Alleluia, Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed Alleluia.*

And a prayer:

*Creator God,*

*Give us a heart for simple things,*

*Love and laughter,*

*Bread and wine,*

*Tales and dreams.*

*Fill our lives*

*With green and growing hope:*

*Make us a people of justice*

*Whose song is Alleluia*

*And whose name breathes love. Amen.*

*Lectons:  
Acts 10.34-43  
Easter Anthems  
Matthew 28.1-10*