

Sunday 16th April, 2017
Year A - Easter Day -

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm: Hymn to the Risen Christ
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Matthew 28:1-10

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

The somewhat controversial theologian, Peter Rollins, once began an Easter sermon with these words: “Without equivocation or hesitation I fully and completely admit that I deny the resurrection of Christ. This I am not afraid to say publicly, no matter what some people may think...”

I suspect that those present were squirming somewhat - perhaps wondering what was going to come next. Then he went on...

“Yes, it is true. I deny the resurrection. I deny the resurrection of Christ every time I do not serve at the feet of the oppressed, each day that I turn my back on the poor; I deny the resurrection of Christ when I close my ears to the cries of the downtrodden and lend my support to an unjust and corrupt system.

However there are moments when I affirm that resurrection, few and far between as they are. I affirm it when I stand up for those who are forced to live on their knees, when I speak for those who have had their tongues torn out, when I cry for those who have no more tears left to shed.”

As I read his words I felt like weeping. I felt like weeping because I couldn't help but think of those innocent men, women, and children in Syria, victims of a nerve gas attack.

My mind turned to refugees, forced into detention centres by our, and others' governments. And I wept for the Coptic Christians in Egypt, easy prey for a fanatical few.

Yes, I thought of all of those people that do not have a voice, or who are unjustly imprisoned, or who suffer daily atrocities. And then I thought of how I, as a Christian, am complicit through my silence or my inaction. Not a comfortable image on this Easter Day, but one which I hold before you for this reason...

Because then my mind turned to someone else who wept for a people, and a nation - how we are told in the Gospels that Jesus wept over Jerusalem. That he lamented how he had wanted to draw that nation of people to himself, and they had not listened, and not followed.

Jerusalem is at the centre of our Easter story. It was the place that Jesus entered in triumph, on Palm Sunday (which seems like a distant memory, given the sheer number of services we have had since then, but was in reality only a week ago!) And as Bishop Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church reminded me during the week, Jesus was in Jerusalem on purpose. He arrived in Jerusalem about the time of the Passover when pilgrims were in the city. When people's hopes and expectations for the dawn of freedom that Moses had promised in the first Passover might suddenly be realized for them in their time.

Jesus arranged his entrance into Jerusalem to send a message. He entered the city, having come in on one side of the city, the scholars tell us, at just about the same time that Pontius Pilate made his entrance on the exact opposite side of the city. Pilate, coming in on a warhorse. Pilate, with soldiers around him. Pilate, representing the Caesars who claimed to be son of god. Pilate, representing the Empire that had taken away their freedom. Pilate, who represented the Empire that would maintain the colonial status of the Jewish people by brute force and violence.

Jesus entered the city on the other side, not on a warhorse, but on a donkey, recalling the words of Zechariah:

Behold your King comes to you
Triumphant and victorious is He
Humble and riding on a donkey

Jesus entered the city at the same time as Pilate to show them, and to show us, that God has another way. That violence is not the way. That hatred is not the way. That brute force and brutality are not the way. Oh that those world leaders today, flexing their military muscle and might would hear and understand this...

Jesus came to show us there is another way. The way of unselfish, sacrificial love. That's why he entered Jerusalem. That's why he went to the cross. It was the power of that love poured out from the throne of God, that even after the horror of the crucifixion would raise him from death to life. And this is why we need to hear those words of Peter Rollins with which I began this sermon, as uncomfortable as they might be.

God came among us in the person of Jesus to start a movement. A movement to change the face of the earth. A movement to change us who dwell upon the earth. A movement to change the creation from the nightmare that is often made of it into the dream that God intends for it.

He didn't just happen to be in Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday. He went to Jerusalem for a reason. To send a message. That not even the titanic powers of death can stop the love of God. On that Easter morning, he rose from the dead, and proclaimed love wins.

So you have a blessed Easter. Go forth to be people of the Resurrection. Follow in the way of Jesus. Don't be ashamed to love. Don't be ashamed to follow Jesus.

Have a blessed Easter. And bless the world

May God's peace be upon you all, and may your Easter be a holy and blessed one.

In the name of God. Amen