

**EASTER DAY: 16<sup>th</sup> April 2017****Matthew 28: 1-10**

Matthew is definitely the special effects Gospel writer. He's the one who gives us tombs cracking open to yield up their dead, rocks splitting and the temple curtain dramatically ripped right down the middle. And he doesn't disappoint here. We get an earthquake, and a descending angel who not only rolls back the stone but kind of nonchalantly sits on it. A bit disconcerting for those grieving women, but wonderful theatre.

But it's not just theatre, it's not just special effects. Because what Matthew is saying is that this news is so earth-shattering you couldn't make it up, you couldn't exaggerate even if you tried.

He is not here, for he has been raised. And this is crucial: Jesus did not rise from the dead. God raised Jesus from the dead. No matter what miracles Jesus may have performed, he cannot raise himself.

Because if he could that would undermine the whole thrust of the story so far which is that he's one of us and that, except for this incredible obedience and trust in God, he knows our limitations too. Gethsemane is not play-acting: Father, let this cup pass from me – but really I know it's all going to be ok. Neither is the Cross: My God, my God, why?, but really this is just a temporary blip.

In our Gethsemanes and our Crucifixions – not to mention the Gethsemanes and Crucifixions of our world - that just won't wash. If the life of Jesus is just God having a kind of thirty-three year excursion into the human realm, a sort of extended divine gap year, where we all know it's going to end in triumph, because it has to, then that's no use to us.

I need to know that God knows what it feels like to be me and how much I struggle with the trust thing. I hate those trust games – and I have done these in the past – where someone calls you to the front and they get a person to stand behind you and then they ask you to let yourself fall backwards (hopefully into their arms), in order to illustrate trust. I can do it, just about, but I'm terrified. I'd rather go white water rafting or something. I don't find it easy to let go, I don't find it easy to fall and trust that someone will catch me.

And yet, and yet, I believe that God is working on us all the time to help us. When I feel like I'm spiralling downwards into darkness of whatever kind, invariably I find a hand reached out to me. The phone rings, a letter arrives, someone I haven't spoken to in ages suddenly gets in touch, a situation of tension or misunderstanding gets resolved somehow, something I've been worrying about gets better often without my doing anything much, someone forgives me or makes me feel accepted in a deeper way. It turns out, I believe, that we are practising resurrection all the time.

All our tombs of loneliness or fear become opportunities to practise trust. In those dark sepulchres of failure or helplessness, those places of powerlessness and waiting we are brought into a place of silent dependence on God. It's that Holy Saturday of waiting which every one of us has experienced even if we never name it as such. These times I want to say, speaking as one who struggles to stay in them and be silent (I have a friend who describes prayer as "bothering God" and I must bother God a lot), these times are pregnant with possibilities of resurrection, even if the answer to our praying may not be what we want.

The Catholic tradition in the Church teaches us to see our human life as vale of soul-making. So we look to see how Jesus made his soul, or how he allowed God to make it. Matthew's Jesus again, in his sermon on the Mount, shows us what a truly free and trusting child of God looks like: Look at the birds of the air, he says: they neither sow nor reap and yet your heavenly Father feeds them; consider the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin, yet not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow...

This is how Jesus lived; this is how Jesus died, trusting for a tomorrow he could not see any more than we can, but nevertheless: Father, into thy hands...

The rest he left up to God, after a lifetime practising trust, after a lifetime practising resurrection. So can we do that? This isn't a trust game, this is keeping our eyes open for hints of resurrection in our own lives every day. Christians expect them. God's mercies are new every morning, so great is his faithfulness; this is the day that the Lord has made – we will rejoice and be glad in it. Those are words for us to call to mind before we even open our eyes in the morning.

This is my last Easter with you, and I want to say that nowhere has my trust in God's faithfulness been more affirmed and re-affirmed than with you, through your trust and your faithfulness. God's new life is so manifest here not just in the big things that are happening, but in the little ways of love and care and friendship, the Jesus things of seeds sown in secret that produce a harvest of goodness that takes everyone's breath away.

Before very long a new priest will stand here, a sign of God's new thing, God's new life—someone to look with you, alongside you, for signs of resurrection and opportunities for resurrection in this Church family, in this community and in the world. Our hope for our Church is filled with the hope of Easter. So I proclaim to you, and with the most thankful heart you can imagine (and I expect a good response from you here): Alleluia, the Lord is risen! *He is risen indeed, Alleluia!* God bless you all. Amen.