

Sermon for Easter Sunday 2016.

Alleluia Christ is risen.

These words are music to our ears. What a wonderful day it is today.

We have moved from the darkness of Good Friday when the hour of evil reigned, to the dazzling light of the empty tomb and there is a lightness in our hearts and a sense of joy all round.

I know that I certainly felt this way when I came to our churches on Saturday evening with Paul to take down all the purple material that covered the crosses on Good Friday.

And when I put the sacrament back in the tabernacle, the feeling of absence was replaced by the feeling of presence in the Risen Lord.

Alleluia Christ is risen - what these words proclaim is newness, freshness, and hope for all.

The resurrection of Jesus lies at the foundation of the Christian faith.

The paschal sacrifice has been consummated, and love has emerged victorious.

The new day has dawned - a new age in human history is born.

All things are possible - transformable, because what was impossible has been overturned.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives hope where hopelessness once ruled.

From the earliest times to present day

we have celebrated Easter and the fifty days immediately following it,

as a season of great thanksgiving and triumph.

In the Liturgical tradition Easter tide is known as the great fifty days.

For the first 40 days we celebrate that Jesus is back in the world

among his friends and disciples, offering his final teaching.

Traditionally these sightings of Jesus are known collectively as resurrection appearances.

After the first 40 days comes the ascension, when Jesus ascends in bodily form

and this is commemorated in the church calendar as the Thursday forty days after Easter.

Then 10 days later, the promised fiery descent of the Holy Spirit is upon us and we celebrate Pentecost.

Easter tide – the great 50 days of thanksgiving and triumph completes the Christian Mystery in a step by step, gentle, slow moving time of days and weeks

that reveal the absolute power of love in our lives over all else in the world.

It is a very personal journey for us because after the revealing of the Risen Lord himself what we see revealed are our own possibilities as we witness in His chosen apostles who are in possession of a new power – the power of the Spirit – which changed every situation in which they were placed.

That supernatural power remains the inheritance of every Christian and our felt experience of being Christian is complete when we rely on it.

In our every day life we do well to pray for it; expect it and trust it; for as we do, we shall gradually become more and more sure of it and be open to realizing our true potential as did the first apostles.

Easter day and the 50 days of Easter provide times filled with delight and wonder manifesting the promises of God.

The prophesy from Isaiah today in the O/T reading speaks about God's promise that sweeps into the world beyond earthly politics and even Temple worship.

Isaiah takes us into a different realm to where there is a new heaven and new earth, where the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, where they shall not hurt or destroy on all God's holy mountain.

Now what makes this prophesy different to the others of a similar nature, is that Isaiah's words move beyond the temple and its priests, to the coming of the glorious new creation in which the Lord's presence extends beyond Jerusalem and into the cosmos.

And in essence this is the very same news –

the good news - that Peter reveals to the gentiles, and all who believe, in the reading from Acts this morning.

The extraordinary promises of God about the glorious new creation come to fulfilment in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And they are fulfilled in us in a very personal way.

I think we sometimes feel this most when the difficulties of life come upon us as they invariably do.

Times when we have sickness, sorrow, or personal troubles, and even when we despair at the violence in the world.

These times can especially be when we feel the personal presence of the Risen Lord and also the absolute assurance that there is more to life than what this world can offer, because the God who has come among us, the one who willingly embraced the darkness of the world and took it with him into death on a cross, has been raised and is here for us.

The promise to hold each one of us in relationship with himself in all situations has been fulfilled.

The wolf and the lamb within - those parts that have opposed each other - that have caused disquiet - can now lie down together for love has been victorious absolutely. It has replaced absence with presence.

To relax into a life in relationship with the God that we have come to know as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is to know something of the graciousness of God, the essence of which is peace.

In the story of the empty tomb in this morning's gospel,

the two men in dazzling clothes said to the women,

“why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

When the meaning of these words continue to grow in our hearts and minds, our life is not just a case of survival, but a life that looks for God's resurrection gift in everything that we do.

Alleluia he is risen.

The Lord be with you.