

### Easter Sunday Address – 2020

This is an Easter Sunday like no other that I have experienced in my lifetime and most likely many of you haven't experienced an Easter Day like this one either. It will be the first Easter Sunday for many years where I have not presided at Holy Communion or where I have not received the bread and the wine for myself. The same for many of you also. It can feel like a grief, a deep missing and longing for something that is not available and we can't have. And, for those of us for whom Holy Communion and the gathering together in fellowship of the Church Family on Easter Day is very important, we are also aware today that we do not know when we will be able to gather again as we used to. That can make us feel very sad and is not the mood of Easter Day that we usually experience. This weekend there is glorious weather and bright nights. We live in beautiful villages and are very blessed in that way. I am sure you youngsters will have Easter Eggs to tuck into and maybe an Easter Egg hunt. If we were in church there would be crafts and activities to do, great excitement and an abundance of Easter Eggs so we will have to do all that virtually this year – please feel free to send me your pictures of Easter egg hunts and the like and I would love to share them – with your permission. You might like to create an Easter garden at home and, again, please send us pictures to display. In church we would be re-telling the story of the stone being rolled away from the tomb and would be looking inside it to discover that Jesus is not there.. and joining together in song to say Alleluia, He is Risen! All that we can't do this year. And in some ways, we are like the disciples and Jesus' friends, on Holy Saturday, the day after Jesus was crucified. They had lost the most precious thing – their Lord. And they were in a bewildered state. How could things have come to this? It was all ok a week ago, now this empty void was in front of them. Everything had gone and they were bereft. I imagine that many of us are feeling that empty void, being bereft and that things have changed – maybe forever. Will life ever get back to normal? And when will it? This was the world on Holy Saturday – just yesterday – in limbo, waiting, not knowing, feeling the change and not being able to reconcile that change. In limbo, waiting.

Over these last few weeks I have been taken back to a previous love of mine before ordination and a call to the Priesthood – the Theatre and performing arts. I had a friend of mine who once said to me that she didn't know how I was going to be a priest and also continue my love for the theatre and producing shows. Truth is, I had to put the theatre activities down because it just didn't fit any more. However, I have been pondering on the whole aspect of theatre production in this virtual world we are now living in and I have re-discovered the fact that, in order to have a successful production, an awful lot has to go on behind the scenes that is unsung and unrecognised. There is huge amounts of work that needs to be done before a performance of any kind can see the light of day. And in my ponderings this week, I have seen theological worth in that analogy also. Much of the work of Jesus in this Holy Week was work that went on in the background in order to enable us to get to Easter Day. On the Saturday, while we are in limbo, the work of God, the Holy Trinity, is carrying on. Jesus is being raised. Don't ask me about the mechanics of that – better theologians than I can discuss that with you. All I know that God's work did not stop with the crucifixion. It carried on, in the background, until we get to that glorious first resurrection morning when the angels appear at the empty tomb and say to the women 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed is going ahead of you to Galilee: there you

will see him.' In fact, Jesus was one step ahead of them – going already to Galilee, he had been busy! The sadness of the disciples must surely have been lifted, not just by the knowledge that Jesus was raised from the dead, but also by the knowledge that all this had happened in the background when they were not aware that anything was happening. He had done it as he said he would. And his work had carried on even on the darkest of days – the day after the crucifixion.

God's work carries on regardless, and our work carries on, in different ways, but it carries on. So much necessary work is done in the background these days and we have heroes who have spent much of their lives being unassuming and overlooked but whose work, it is now recognised, is absolutely vital. The refuse collectors, the cleaners, the transport workers, the shop assistants, the warehouse workers, the delivery drivers... and so on and so on... vital work is always going on in the background and our God understands this because He is continually working on our behalf in the background, whether we recognise him or not, he is always there and always working. So, we don't need to feel afraid and in limbo on Saturday, waiting for Sunday, because God is at work.

Another pondering I have had over these last few weeks is the thought of what do I do now I can't do what I used to do? And for many of us, we are turning our hands to creative things, or in some cases, going back to things we used to do but never had the time. I have been thinking about Jesus' hands. They have such marked significance at Easter time through the stories we read in the gospels, because of what his hands do. His hands ride the donkey into Jerusalem, his hands turn over the tables of the money changers in the temple, his hands share his last Passover with his disciples, his hands wash his disciples' feet, his hands are lifted up in prayer in Gethsamane, his hands are nailed to the cross and scarred, and his hands reach out to bless as he is risen. Hands, of course, are the symbol of this pandemic – we wash our hands continually, we sanitise and glove them for protection, the hands of our nurses care for other, the hands of many workers clean and provide, people's hands are creative, making new things, and all of our hands are continually typing on keyboards and phones! It's not my idea but I have pondered on this thought given to me a few days ago: Jesus' scarred hands were a permanent reminder of the work he had done and the sacrifice he made. His scarred hands have always reminded us of his work. Though difficult and sacrificial that work of Christ was vital for all of us to be saved. We will not get this time again. Perhaps we are glad that it will end at some point, however, this time also affords us an opportunity to do things differently, to work differently, to blossom and to grow in different ways. Let's not waste the opportunities we have been given in this crisis. We could make a significant difference to our own and others' lives by the work we choose to do with our hands during this time.

And finally, we are encouraged today to look forward. It may not feel like Easter Day, the day when we celebrate Christ's freedom from death and our salvation. We may still feel locked in, hemmed in and in limbo – like on Holy Saturday - waiting for the resurrection and when life can begin again. However, maybe now is the time to be in the mode of Holy Saturday but differently from the disciples who didn't know that there was hope coming. We DO know hope is coming and we can live in that hope. We are not sure, maybe, that things will ever be the same and that is not to say that difficult times won't be ahead, even when the lockdown ends. But we have to have hope that things will be restored. Back in my media days when I taught Drama and Media Arts, I often discussed narrative form – the idea that a story begins with one set of circumstances, an equilibrium, then something happens to throw that equilibrium into chaos, the battle with which takes up the majority of the storyline, and then at the end, a new equilibrium is established – with some familiar elements but also with changed elements. We will emerge from our Holy Saturday experience, changed, no doubt, but hopefully stronger, more resilient, more encouraged and more faithful than before.