

<b>Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2020 Livestreamed, Grahamstown 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>Easter Day 2020 DAY 24 of the uring the COVID19 lockdown</b>
Jeremiah 31:1-6	Ps 118:1-2, 14-24	Acts 10: 34-43 John 20:1-18
<b>Life and hope – a whole new world</b>		

“Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’: and she told them that he had said these things to her” (John 20:18).

We gather together on this Easter Day, at a unique time in our lives, in the middle of the COVID19 lock down, an Easter Day like none other. For many, this is a time of turmoil, fear, despair, profound anxiety, a sense of helplessness. The announcement by the President of an extension to the lock down period was predictable, but nevertheless emphasised the challenges we face. This is the context for our Easter celebration.

In the face of despair, the central narrative of the Christian faith at Easter is a narrative of hope. In the face of fear, courage and strength. In the face of death, new life. The unexpected. An empty tomb. Grave cloths left lying in their place. Stunned and initially unbelieving disciples. A whole new world.

## SCRIPTURES

Let's immerse ourselves in the scriptures given to us on this Easter Day.

*God's faithfulness to his people:*

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness towards you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel!” (Jeremiah 31:3-4)

*A song of praise and trust:*

“The Lord is my strength and my song: and has become my salvation... *This* [own emphasis] is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:14, 24)

*The testimony of the apostle Peter:*

“We are witnesses to all that Jesus did... they put him to death... but God raised him on the third day ... he appeared to us who were chosen by God as witnesses...” (Acts 10:39-41) - *we are witnesses* – the witness of the first disciples, the early church.

*Mary, Peter and John on the first Easter Day:*

Our gospel reading begins early on the first day of the

week. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb of Jesus. The tomb is the place of ending. Finality. The end of hope, the end of a dream. Why, I wonder, does Mary go there? To grieve? To weep?

She discovers that the stone has been rolled away and the tomb is empty. She assumes that the body has been removed. She calls Peter and John. They run to the tomb; John sees the grave cloths and the head wrapping lying there by itself, and he believes.

Mary then meets the Risen Christ. She does not immediately recognise him. But he calls her by name, and she realises who it is. She goes and announces to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

There is a wonder and an intimacy in all this. These are not simply feel-good messages; these are signs and reminders of the presence of God in the lives of his people. The testimony of many witnesses down the ages.

We are not alone. Many of us are standing at our own tombs, our places of despair. Fear. A future unknown. So much that is crumbling around us. But the Easter promise is that in these places of death, we shall find new life. The risen Christ will make himself known to us.

## **EASTER DAY 2020**

Over the past 2000 years, in times of war and disaster and famine and plague, and in times of joy and peace and plenty, Christians have celebrated Easter. This year is no different. We come with Mary, Peter and the beloved disciple to the tomb, to the place of death and sadness; we bring with us our broken lives, fears and sorrows. Through the eyes of Mary, we encounter the completely unexpected – an empty tomb; the Risen Christ calls us by name; he invites us to trust and believe. Death and despair do not have the last word. The dawn will break, the light will come.

Easter Day is a day of thanksgiving for our deliverance, through the cross and resurrection, from the power of evil and sin and death. We proclaim that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again; we give thanks “for Christ’s glorious resurrection from the dead. By his death he has destroyed death, and by his rising again he has restored to us eternal life”. Profound words in the face of coronavirus and the circumstances we live under, at this present time.

So what does this mean for us? For those who are ill, or who are dying? For families who have lost jobs and are sitting with no income? For school pupils and university students having to study online, with or without internet and computer access? For households where there is domestic abuse? For overcrowded communities?

Certainly, we are living in tough times, and we cannot pretend otherwise. The shutdown has heightened the huge inequalities under which we live in this country. And with the shutdown now extended until the end of April, things are going to get harder for many.

Yet even in these few weeks, there have been some good things. People stepping up with donations to the hungry. Our President and cabinet giving a third of their salary to the Solidarity Fund. Time at home to read, reflect, pray. Children and parents interacting, playing, spending time together. People coming together, networking, reaching out, looking with new eyes at what is happening around them and seeing how to help, to support, to provide, to assist.

Many are turning to prayer and to God to find strength for each day. I know how much this has been important to me over these past weeks.

And we have the opportunity to reimagine what our communities, our world, should be like, so that when the lock down is over, we don't simply go back to normal. The rat race. The huge inequalities in our society. Our desperately polluted environment. What we need, suggests Brother Scott OHC, is to awaken<sup>1</sup>. To wake up. To vision and to enable a whole new world. To create a changed world because we are changed people. Changed by eyes

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<sup>1</sup> *Sleepers Awake – After the Virus*. 11<sup>th</sup> April 2020

that have been opened; changed by repentant hearts; changed by a deep desire to live differently; to look with fresh eyes at the world that we have made, with its brokenness and its beauty.

Ebenezer Scrooge is the character in *The Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, who wakes up on Christmas Day from his dreams, truly wakes up and sees what he has done, the misery he has created. “But he is transformed. He cannot go back to his old world because he is a new person. The world doesn’t change. He does.... He becomes a beacon of hope and caring to all who know him”<sup>2</sup>.

There are many signs of life and hope and promise, in the midst of struggle and darkness and fear and despair. People are waking up. Resurrection is all around us.

## CONCLUSION

We are resurrection people. Our faith and trust is in Jesus Christ who died and rose again. Nothing can separate us from his love. Let’s hold on in courage and hope as we journey into new life.

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Dean of Grahamstown  
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<sup>2</sup> Br Scott OHC, *op cit*