

Easter Week Reflections 2020

Monday – Fear and Joy (with thanks to Rev. Sam Wells, who wrote this in 2013)

Of all the feelings and passions of Easter, let's focus on two today. I want to take you back to that distant Sunday morning, the first day of the week. Two people rose early, their sandaled feet covered in dust and strained by running. They went to the tomb, and met there an angel, who broke open their whole world, saying 'He is not here: he is risen.' Feel the intensity of their emotion: smell it. St Matthew tells us what they did, and what they felt. They ran. They ran, with fear and great joy. With fear, and great joy. And we can see them running, with fear, with the hasty, gulping breath of fear; and with gurgling joy, with the outstretched hands and billowing cloak and squealing yelps of joy.

Fear and great joy: at the heart of the resurrection, and at the extremes of our hearts today. So much to fear, so many reasons to be afraid. Fear for ourselves... Fear for those we love... Fear that we can't protect our loved ones... And fear about issues way beyond our control... So much to fear.

And yet also great joy. Joy of a spring lamb finding its rickety feet in a meadow; joy of a baby discovering how to swallow; joy of the song, when we have the words, and God has the tune; joy of the harvest, when all is fresh and mellow. The joy of friendship, of those we have known and loved through thick and thin. The joy of forgiveness, when bitterness and failure don't get the last word. The joy of creation, when we hear birds chirrup on a spring morning. The joy of being part of a team, when you believe in what you are doing and where you are going. The joy of the orchestra, about to break into a thrilling crescendo. The joy of a craftsman, perfecting his wood. Great joy. Great, great joy.

So here we are, at the moment when the angel's words break open our lives, and we start to run with fear and great joy. Fear and joy, the two poles, the two extremes of our human response to the awesome intimacy of God. Fear and joy run with us throughout our lives together, as constant reminders of the cost and promise of following Jesus. Fear and joy, at the centre of our longings, at the heart of our desires.

But there is a secret. It is a secret that we only glimpse at in this life. It is a secret that was first revealed to those two early risers on the first day of the week, while all creation breathed in the aroma of anticipation. It is the secret of Easter. It is a secret that I pray we will realize in the course of the year to come. It is a secret that is the climax of our gospel, a secret of the mystery of fear and joy. And the secret is this: joy wins.

Tuesday – The Season of Easter (with thanks to Dr Mark D. Roberts, reproduced with permission)

Happy Easter! No, really! No, I haven't got my days mixed up. Yes, I do mean to wish you "Happy Easter". You may be done with Easter Sunday services and Easter egg hunts. But Easter isn't over, at least not for millions of Christians throughout history and throughout the world today. Easter Sunday begins a 7-week season in the church year that ends with Pentecost Sunday, the day Christians remember the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the earliest believers in Jesus.

Celebrating Easter for fifty days is not duplicating Easter Sunday fifty times over. Rather, it's taking time to reflect upon and delight in the truth of Easter and its implications for our lives.

The basic truth of Easter is simple. In the classic litany of the church, it's this: *Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!* On Easter Sunday, we celebrate this good news, rediscovering for ourselves what the earliest followers of Jesus realized on that first Easter Sunday. Yet the implications of the resurrection are more than we can adequately ponder on one day. Eastertide provides an opportunity to see "the director's cut" of the Easter sermon, if you will. The season of Easter gives us a chance to reflect more broadly and deeply on the multifaceted meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. What might this involve? Let me suggest a few ideas:

- You could meditate upon what the resurrection says about the character of Jesus Christ as the Righteous One of God (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:25-28).
- You might ponder the fact that death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54-56).
- You could reflect upon the fact that the very power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you today (Ephesians 1:15-23).
- You might think of how the resurrection of Jesus is a precursor to your own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15).
- You could consider how the resurrection gives us "new birth into a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3).

And so on. And so on. Eastertide allows us to think deeply and to pray broadly about what the resurrection of Jesus means, both to us and to our world. If nothing else, recognizing Eastertide gives us a chance to take the truths of Scripture and to allow them to percolate in our hearts. I don't know about you, but I need this sort of percolation.

What would happen in our lives if we went through each day with a sixth-sense awareness of the resurrection? What would we attempt if we truly believed that the power that raised Jesus from the dead was available to us? What difference would it make if we knew for sure that death has been defeated through Christ?

This is why we celebrate Eastertide – and as we do, may God breathe his resurrection life into us once more.

Wednesday – Justin Welby’s Easter Message 2020 (excerpt)

For the full text, click here: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/sermons/archbishop-canterburys-easter-sermon>

In 1944 a British soldier, in the Normandy campaign was asked by a friend what he would do after the war. He had been an architect in peacetime and his answer was that he would build a Cathedral. His name was Basil Spence, and his friends must have thought he was mad, for only one cathedral had been completed in England since St Paul’s in London 350 years earlier.

In 1950 Spence, fired with hopeful inspiration and ambition, won the competition to design Coventry Cathedral, one of the greatest of the post war symbols of peace and reconciliation. It was completed in 1962.

Imagination, ambition, hope, are some of the foods that nourish our minds in dark times. They can be mere escapism, or they can give us a settled direction and intention.

To this day the resurrection of Jesus is the solid foundation of all hopes for a better world. The resurrection changes not just us individually, but is the fuel for hope-filled ambition and for imagination that builds dreams into reality. The key Christian distinctive is hope.

Which brings us to today, Easter Day 2020. Who does not feel the shock of the last weeks? People right across the Globe feel the same uncertainty, fear, despair and isolation. But you are not alone.

The women went to the tomb in the dark, and there they found the light and hope of Christ risen from the dead. In the weeks and months that followed they had a new vision of justice, they shared their goods, they cared for each other so powerfully that over time the world changed, and changes to this day.

This was a vision of the Kingdom of God come on earth, where death would not be the end. Which brings us back to ambitious imagination and *unreasonable* hope. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have a hope that is surer than stone; than any architecture.

Even in the dark days of this Easter we can feed on hope. We can dream of what our country and our world will look like after the pandemic. There will still be wickedness and war, poverty and persecution, greed and grasping. There always has been; always will be. Yet in the resurrection of Jesus God lights a fire which calls us to justice, to live in humble generosity, to transform our societies.

After so much suffering, so much heroism from key workers and the NHS, so much effort, once this epidemic is conquered here and round the world, we cannot be content to go back to what was before as if all is normal.

There needs to be a resurrection of our common life, something that links to the old, but is different and more beautiful. We must dream it because it is the gift of God. Then we must build it in partnership with God. In the new life of the resurrection of Jesus, we dare to have faith in life before death. We hope, because of the resurrection.

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Thursday – Our Father in heaven

The following is Day Two of the Church of England's 'Easter Pilgrim' daily reflections, based on the Lord's Prayer: an excellent free resource available online or via your phone. To sign up (and/or download the app), visit: <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/living-out-our-faith/lent-holy-week-and-easter/easterpilgrim-lords-prayer>

There are just 63 words in the Lord's Prayer in contemporary English. They are meant to be said by every disciple every day. The words have power to shape the deepest places in our lives. They are the gospel – the good news. They are life-giving medicine for hungry, confused and weary souls.

Matthew 6:⁷ *'When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.* ⁸ *Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

⁹ *'Pray then in this way:*

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ *Your kingdom come.*

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us this day our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you;* ¹⁵ *but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

These first four words – 'Our Father in heaven' – help us find our place again each day in the vastness of the universe. We are not here by chance, as random collections of atoms in infinite space. We are people and we are called into a relationship with our creator.

That relationship is defined by love: not our weak love for God but God's strong love for us. The love of a Father for his children. God made you. God loves you powerfully and personally. God calls us by name into a relationship of love and trust, which forms us and recreates us as God's children: 'Our Father in heaven'.

Prayer: *"Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you:
pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself,
and so bring us at last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen."*

Practical idea: Set an alarm on your phone every hour today. When it sounds, simply say these four words: 'Our Father in heaven'. What do you notice?

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Friday – Mary

Mary's encounter with Jesus is one of the profoundly moving stories of Scripture – where truth becomes lived experience. For Mary, the resurrection was not simply a doctrine or a fulfilled prophecy – she experienced it. Eugene Peterson talks about Resurrection Land, and he puts it like this:

“We enter into the country that we have been looking at from a distance, the country of resurrection. We have been taking in the contours of the landscape, the grand horizons. Now we find ourselves in it, our feet on the actual ground. We smell the wild fragrance of resins and blossoms, touch the textured tree bark, feel the rain on our heads and the wind in our faces. We are in the country of salvation, the land of resurrection.

It is one thing to look at the grandly profiled horizons and thrill to the weather gathering behind mountain ranges, launching huge light shows with sudden bursts of sunlight through fissures in the clouds, fireworks of lightning scored by organ thunder. It is quite another to leave the car or bus or train, & walk into the forest & climb those mountains.”

At Easter, Mary didn't just understand the glorious truth that Jesus was alive, she met Jesus, she experienced Resurrection Land. Jesus spoke her name...

Perhaps you need to hear him say your name again today. Perhaps it's been a tough time for you. Perhaps there's been difficulties for you in different areas – family, work, friends – and we don't know what to do. Like Mary we run around saying, what's going on? What's happening?

Let Jesus meet you again today, not with an answer, but with himself. Listen to him call your name, affectionately, tenderly. Imagine looking up and seeing his face, and his mouth mouthing the single word of your name...

Dwell in that moment. Experience it afresh.

Saturday – The Recipe for an Easter Person

As we finish our reflections for Easter Week, let's revisit a legendary talk from Alise in 2014, when she baked a cake live in church on Easter Sunday, and shared the recipe for an Easter person:

Method

1. Take your 2 chunks of determination (**butter**) and mix it thoroughly with wisdom (**sugar**) so that the two bind and make a person who knows God's will and is determined to carry it out.
2. Now stir in two generous splashes of obedience (**milk**) – but gently so the mixture doesn't become harsh and spoiled – obedience is something that tends to be added in over time
3. Next add the cracked pride (**egg**) which, when thoroughly beaten, will instead of making the cake dense and heavy, give it a light texture and will make people want a second helping
4. Now sieve the love and compassion (flour) to get rid of any lumps of unforgiveness or anger of stuff that will get in the way of the person growing. Double-sieving will ensure that the love is refined and purified and will have the maximum impact on the mixture – fold it in gently now so that it works right into the obedience and humility
5. Next add a pinch of trial (**salt**), this will help to bring out the flavour of all the other ingredients. It keeps the flavour from being dull and adds depth (not too much though, as it can spoil the mixture and be over powering)
6. Finally just before baking, add a layer of two big dollops of joy (**jam**) which will make your mixture irresistible to everyone

Now place your mixture in the centre of community (**microwave**) on full power of the Spirit to ensure the mixture cooks right through and tastes delicious.

What is Easter about? Or to put it another way, if Jesus reveals who God is, what is God's character, what are those attributes? Well, it's all here, in our recipe isn't it: wisdom, determination, obedience, humility, love and compassion, trial and joy. That's the divine mixture that allowed Jesus to be obedient to the end & so turn defeat into great victory.

And since his Spirit now dwells in us, it's our recipe too. What ingredients do we need to mix into our lives in this season?