

Luke 24:1-12; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Acts 10:34-43  
27<sup>th</sup> March 2016 – Easter Sunday  
8 & 10 a.m. St. Andrew's, Totteridge.

*May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

“The only thing at the first Easter which transformed the disillusioned friends and disciples of Jesus into a world-converting power was the reality of the resurrection.”

So sayeth Robert Runcie, former Bishop of our own diocese of St. Albans, and Archbishop of Canterbury from 1980-91. There were many occasions when Jesus told the disciples about the way his ministry would end, but it took the two men in dazzling clothes to persuade Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the ‘other’ women that what Jesus had predicted had come true.

Two men in dazzling clothes – two persons of light. It’s quite an amazing story isn’t it – quite a big ask in terms of belief. It helps me to believe that Jesus has been saying throughout his ministry that this was what would happen. It sickens me that, despite all his amazing deeds, his love and kindness, his healing, his willingness to include, involve and transform so many people around him, that a) he was deserted by everyone at the end, and b) we killed him.

And I say we, because I have no doubt that the same thing would happen again if he came today, and that I might so easily be complicit in his death, through my fears, my doubts, my inaction, or my disappointment at his refusal to go the way I might want him to go.

Even though I have tasted eternity as the very meaning and goal of all human life. Not just in creation and the awesome beauty of our world and the universe, but through scripture, through prayer, through revelation. The way prayers are answered in God’s good time and manner is, I find, very often a revelation. I have tasted of the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come, all the disciples did, yet they and I have walked away occasionally & chosen to forget what he came to tell us,

<sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,  
<sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’

As Malcolm Guite has said, ‘in a daring and beautiful creative reversal, God takes the worst we can do to him, and turns it into the very best he can do for us.’ So we all need to be reminded of the gospel stories, if not by men in dazzling white, then by the Gospel writers themselves and by reading them again and again for ourselves. And then we need to have faith, believe in hope, believe that what once was dead can return to life.

Forgive me for a moment if I take you now back to your childhood - I imagine that most of you know the story of Peter Pan, the book based on J. M. Barrie’s famous play about the boy who wouldn’t grow up. It has a whole cast of wonderful characters, the evil pirate Cptn. Hook, the three children, Wendy, John & Michael, Nana the Newfoundland dog, the Lost Boys. And then there is the fairy Tinkerbell...

Now I realise that I am in danger here of being accused of being 'away with the fairies' myself here – but stick with me please, there's a deep question of faith in this story. I think you would need a heart of stone not to be touched by the scene where Tinkerbell, occasionally ill-behaved and vindictive, at other times helpful and kind, rushes in to stop Peter from drinking his poisoned medicine by drinking it herself. There is no greater love our Lord has told us.

Tinkerbell, sometimes played by merely by a light flashing around the stage, tells Peter that she could be saved if the audience are prepared to believe in her. As Tinkerbell's light grows dimmer and dimmer, Peter turns to the audience and begs them to show their faith by clapping for Tinkerbell – and sure enough, it's the children who usually lead a growing thunder of applause. As the clapping gets louder, Tinkerbell's light gets stronger & stronger, until she is fully restored.

Children are often far deeper in their faith and convictions than we adults – we take advantage of this sometimes. Sometimes for good and generous reasons, as with the tradition of Father Christmas, but sometimes adults can be vile in our abuse of the depth of faith a child may have. Some would put this down to mere gullibility, but I'd remind you of what Jesus said about this,

**15** People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. **16** But Jesus called for them and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God

belongs. **17** Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.'

The mystery of the Resurrection is a principle issue in Christian faith and belief. The belief of the Apostle Paul came about almost entirely through a sudden blinding revelation, but he recognized that, despite his total conviction in the factuality of the Risen Christ, it is difficult for humanity living in a material world to believe in the unseen. He admits, that '**If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied**' (1 Cor. 15.19).

So, to close, I remind you that Robert Runcie, a man who saw all too clearly the brutality of warfare, had no problem in referring to 'the reality of the resurrection.' In fact he went further, and talked of how the Christian community was formed by those who truly believed that God had, once and for all, acted to open the door through which humanity passes to share in a divine life, a life which not even death and time can quench. It is for this we bring our Easter praise. God bless you all and have a happy Easter.

## Luke 24:1-12 The Resurrection of Jesus

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup>But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

## 1 Corinthians 15.19-26

<sup>19</sup>If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. <sup>21</sup>For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; <sup>22</sup>for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the

Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

## Acts 10:34-43 Gentiles Hear the Good News

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup>You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup>That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup>how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup>We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup>but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup>not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup>He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup>All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

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