



“We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our Song”

You may have come across these words before - and perhaps know that they are attributed to Pope John Paul II. He used them in sermons on more than one occasion - sometimes adding a preliminary phrase “Do not abandon yourself to despair. We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our Song.” The quote may be a paraphrase from St Augustine, which gives it a long history - but not one which goes back to the beginning - to the apostles and the Easter story of Jesus himself. Our Gospel passage for today tells us that the disciples were terrified and bewildered. They had locked themselves away for safety in case those who had crucified Jesus were coming to kill them too - and they were trying to make sense of the terrible events of their past few days and what that meant for their future and their new Christian faith. They knew Jesus had been crucified. They knew that the tomb had been found empty. But they had no idea what “risen from the dead” meant. They were trying to survive in that present moment, and had no thoughts about what might come next - what purpose life without Jesus as their leader could have.

The reading describes how Jesus appeared in the middle of this chaos and terror, and tries to bring peace and reassurance. He proves that he is a living person by inviting them to touch the wounds of his crucifixion - and he takes food and eats it. He must be alive, he says - he can't be a ghost, as they fear. But it's not as simple as Jesus reverting back to be the person he was before his death. He comes and goes through locked doors, and often those who really know him well don't seem to recognise him. This is the mystery of the resurrection. The disciples struggled to understand - and so do we today. I haven't got any neat answers - but what I think is most important is that every time Jesus appears to his disciples he says “Peace be with you”. Jesus brings peace to his beloved disciples - then, always and forever. And he brings peace to us - now, always and forever - whether or not we understand the meaning of that impossible word “resurrection”. To experience that peace I think we need to stop trying to understand the event in history, and to think about what the event - resurrection - means for us now. What it means to be ‘Easter People’, and how this might govern the way we live our lives.

Easter People believe that the resurrection - however it might be explained scientifically - shows that suffering, pain, disappointment, even death can be transformed by God's love into new life. It's a message of hope and promise - a message of love and fulfilment - to be lived now and forever.

I first heard the quote in a national service at the time when the CofE was finally moving towards ordaining women as priests. I felt the words were being addressed to me, and I still try to hold on to them - the undying hope of new life and new beginnings whatever the current pain and distress. You may have heard the quote in different situations - including as the introduction to Easter sermons. But this is not just a message for Easter - it's a reminder of what our loving God promises us for every day. New life, new hope, and crucifixions which lead to new beginnings.

We are called to be Easter People. We don't have to understand resurrection but to live it - and to pass on this message of hope in our troubled world. We need to have ‘Alleluia’ (Praise God) as our Song.