

Bishop Gregor's Easter Message 2016

On Easter Day, always and above all else, quite simply and gloriously, we are celebrating what God has done. And what God has done is to have raised Jesus from the dead: as Peter proclaims in Acts, *God raised him on the third day*. And in St Mark's Gospel it's the same with the young man at the tomb speaking to the terrified women: *He has been raised*. Mark takes only 8 verses to tell us this as opposed to more than 10 times that number to tell us of Jesus's death and burial. Many people saw Jesus being put to death, and so there was much to say, but nobody saw God raise Him from the dead, nobody could or can describe precisely what God did, or exactly how God did it. None of the Gospels, nor any other writing in the New Testament, even tries. Attempts to do that, in art, drama and film, unless they are very subtle indeed, mostly fail and are, anyhow, pretty much beside the point. Because the point is that, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. An event in history yes, but an event pointing way beyond all history and having its origin not in human history but in the life of God and in the wonderful purposes of God for human history.

One of the things that I love about St Mark's announcement of the resurrection in particular is the ending of it: *So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid*. No faith there, no response of joy, no belief in what God had done: presumably that all came later. Oddly enough, this is very important, this focus on the announcement of Jesus' resurrection and not on the faith of its witnesses. And for this reason: faith doesn't lead to talk of Jesus being raised from the dead, but rather Jesus being raised from the dead makes faith possible.

What kind of faith does the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead make possible? Above all, a baptismal faith: renouncing evil, turning away from wrong-doing, becoming good news and sources of blessing in the world, seeking what is just and peaceful and caring for God's creation, playing our own part in the worship, prayer, faith and action of all God's people. It is the baptismal form of faith that is always most powerfully celebrated at Easter either at Baptism itself or in the renewal of Baptismal promises.

And there is a particular Easter dimension of this faith. Because the raising of Jesus from the dead makes faith that the last word about things is not ours, but God's, possible; makes faith that human capacities to do ill, to be destructive, are not the be all and end all, possible; makes faith that doing justice, loving mercy and waking humbly with God among his people is what is required of us now and is the way to share Christ's resurrection in all its fullness, possible.

The people who got rid of Jesus believed quite reasonably that they had seen him off once and for all. But they were hopelessly wrong. As Peter said, *they put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but* - the biggest "but" of all time really - *God raised him from the dead*. Theirs was not the last word, God's was, and is and always will be, a word of imperishable life to make faith in an imperishable life possible.

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Amen.