


THE EYE THAT NEVER WEPT

Acts 10. 34-43

Colossians 3. 1-4

John 20. 1-18

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

The English poet John Donne wrote in one of his sermons: ‘And when God shall come to that last act in the glorifying of man, when he promises “to wipe all tears from his eyes”, what shall God have to do with that eye that never wept?’

Across the globe on this Easter morning, sermons are being preached in a multitude of different languages to congregations of various nationalities and backgrounds. Within these congregations are to be found, sitting beside one another, men and women in very different personal circumstances. Some will have hearts full of joy; some will have lives that are neither especially happy nor especially burdensome; and some will be struggling with worries and cares: trying to make ends meet, fighting ill health, struggling with relationships, all feeling the weight of the world upon their shoulders.

And yet, despite the diversity of place, background and personal circumstances, there is the same humanity, the same human condition, and the same message of Easter that is proclaimed everywhere: Death and sin have been overcome! The Lord is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

This is a message of the most profound blessing: that, as shown in the Resurrection of Jesus, the love of God is greater than anything that life might throw at us. The ultimate victory is assured. But although the ultimate victory is assured, and despite the fact that we have a sure ground for hope no matter what we face, at least for most of us, the vicissitudes of life do not simply fade away.

The Good News of the Resurrection does not push to one side our vulnerabilities as though they are now of no concern. We continue to laugh, and we continue to cry. And this need not be a bad thing: for to laugh and to cry is for us in our humanity (the very same humanity that Christ possessed) to engage with a world that is both beautiful and difficult, the very same world that our Lord came to save. But now, with the assurance of the ultimate victory of the love of God over anything that life might throw at us, our laughter and our tears take on a new meaning: they become part of the great story of the salvation of the world. That is Donne's main point. What shall God have to do with that eye that never wept?

In the passage from the gospel of St John appointed for Easter morning, about which myriad sermons will be preached, the focus is on that brief time when the initial indications of the Resurrection are given. Three privileged people have the first encounter with the reality of an event of cosmic significance.

We begin with Mary Magdalene. She arrives at the tomb of Jesus and finds that the stone has been rolled away. Rather than look into the tomb and investigate, she runs to Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple to raise the alarm: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

She is possessed by sadness and by fear. Yes, she has heard many words spoken by Christ about his suffering, death, and rising; but in her current state, she is not yet ready to take on board the enormity of what has taken place. And so she weeps. Her tears speak of her love; they have value and meaning. What shall God have to do with that eye that never wept? And possessing a love for our Lord shown by her tears, she will soon come to a deep understanding of what has actually happened.

Then we have Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Many have wondered why the Evangelist gives details of who arrived at the tomb first and who entered first. One

traditional reading is that the Beloved Disciple, as well as being a person in his own right, stands for love: it is love that arrives at the tomb first. And with love now in place, Simon Peter, who stands for the Church, can lead and enter the tomb. His focus is on the evidence and figuring out the clues. But it is still the Beloved Disciple, the one whom we are told Jesus loved, who intuits something of the enormity of what has happened and believes.

Three different people; three different responses in the face of the same reality. Today in the language of statistics, we might speak of this trio as a very small representative sample. But even this small sample mirrors something of the diversity of ways that men and women in very different personal circumstances in the congregations across the globe will respond to the message that is ours today: Death and sin have been overcome! The Lord is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

The joy remains; and, for most of us at least, the vicissitudes of life remain. The glorious news of the Resurrection does not sweep them away, or short-circuit the human condition. Instead, it speaks to us no matter where we are, no matter what we have to face. And it is reassuring to know that this has always been the case, right back to the earliest witnesses on that that blessed morning more than two thousand years ago.

The ultimate assurance is now revealed. Nothing can change that. Nothing can change the reality that is so much greater than whatever our individual personal circumstances might be, but which still reaches out to us regardless, and gives the challenges we face new meaning. Dear friends, Happy Easter! Death and sin have been overcome! The Lord is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Amen.