



Resurrection, weather permitting

I bet that some of you, on the Tuesday after the Bank Holiday, would have been asked 'did you have a good Easter?'

The polite response would have been to say 'yes, thanks', and then to ask about theirs.

The more accurate though almost certainly irritating response would have been to relocate their question about the past into the present, and to say that you *were still having a good Easter*, perhaps adding (and this could soon become really annoying) that Easter began on Easter Day, vaults high over the Bank Holiday, and does not hit the ground again for a full fifty days, until the Feast of Pentecost in fact.

How to lose friends and bore people. But it serves as a way into something I've been thinking about since Easter Day: What does the resurrection of Christ do to the way we live?

What follows is not poking a finger or laying a charge. It is not wanting to make anyone feel bad. I simply want us to go exploring, using human quirkiness and human experience, alongside some irony perhaps, to better know ourselves and as a step to better understanding this astonishing and very short journey we call life.

Self-knowledge about our easy accommodations and our 'ifs' and 'buts' might sometimes lead to a dumbing down of our aspirations and conduct but often doesn't. It instead can foster wisdom. Wisdom is a different thing to knowledge and often a better friend, one more able to marry up within ourselves things like virtue and forgiveness (forgiveness of others and of ourselves).

On Easter morning, two weeks ago, whilst it was still dark, many gathered here in church. Some had spent Holy Saturday night here as part of a vigil, keeping watch whilst Christ, according to the Gospels, lay in the tomb and whilst, according to parts of Christian tradition, was busy with the 'harrowing of hell' (something we make reference to in the Creed when we say *was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead*).

That morning, in the thin light just as dawn broke we made our way outside, saw the first fire of Easter lit in the garden, transferred its light to the new Paschal candle, and processed that new Easter flame back into the dark church, stopping at three points to proclaim, in song: *the Light of Christ: thanks be to God*.

Once in the church and gathered around the font, the flame from the paschal candle spread to candles we all held, as we heard sung the haunting *Exsultet*. At the end of which, we made that first acclamation *Christ is risen, He is risen indeed, Alleluia*.

Just 12 hours earlier, one of the emails exchanged between the clergy, dealing with the allocation of duties at the dawn liturgy, concluded with an understandable variation on the child's perennial question *are we there yet?* It ended with simply, *We are nearly there!* Indeed we were. The liturgical scaffolding around Holy Week can be a little overwhelming, and Easter Day represents the culmination and the prospect of time off. That phrase – 'we're nearly there' – stayed with me. Nearly where, *exactly?* I wondered.

In the way of 'buses seemingly turning up in pairs, another phrase over those holy days popped up and teased me. If you were at the Dawn Liturgy you would have seen it, for it

appeared at the end of the order of service that had seen us process out and in and out again and had us hear the great affirmations of the Easter gospel account from John. At the very end of the service sheet, it said: “we now process to Piccadilly Circus to proclaim the resurrection... *weather permitting*”.

It was that quintessential qualifier *weather permitting* which stood out.

You might say it's wonderfully Church of England, middle class, middle aged, Home Counties. Maybe it is those things, but more. It captures (to my mind at least) something both sweet and shocking about what we tend to make of the resurrection, and to some extent of the entire Christian adventure.

‘*We're nearly there*’ and ‘*weather permitting*’. I knew what was meant by the first, and I had some instinctive sympathy for the second. *We're nearly where exactly?* And what's the weather got to do with the resurrection?

A third element that seemed not entirely coincidental is that Easter Day this year fell on the first of April, All Fools' Day. It doesn't do that very often. The last time it happened I was 7 days old.

Historically All Fools' Day is marked by the playing of practical jokes and the spreading of hoaxes. Were he still alive, the very valuable Christopher Hitchens would have exploited the coincidence, since for him, Christianity along with all religion is the ultimate practical joke and hoax.

Not everyone is interested in the Christian story. And of those who are, there are different tribes. Some engage with it principally through the imagination; others through dogma and doctrine; some through the institution of the church and its liturgies and sacraments; others rather more pantheistic, finding clues of God in nature and the stars; some a bit New Agey. Yet, whatever type of follower we are, we cannot properly escape the question *what difference*

does the resurrection make to who I am and what I do?

And so I want to lay before you, and me, that question: The Resurrection – what does it mean to you; where *exactly* does it take you; where do you *let* it take you; what things limit your response to its claims – the weather? Your diary engagements? Your career ambitions? Your desire to be popular or sexy? Your need to always be on top of things? The pain in your hip, the terror you have about death? The grief you feel overwhelmed by? The shame that circumstance and experience have saddled you with?

It's not much good engaging in the annual liturgical ping-pong of *Alleluia! Christ is risen/ He is risen indeed, alleluia!* if that same affirmative, assertive (acerbic even) exchange doesn't find some traction in our life, some comparable expression beyond the church building. And in any event, it's not a balm; it is not an ointment. It is not a liturgical High Five.

It is a challenge. *It is an affront* (an affront to death and the power and fear of death for a start). Let it do its work – in your life, *whatever the weather*.

I can't tell you what that work will be in *your* life, and I feel pretty clueless about what that work needs to be in my own life, though I'm further along than I once was. There are always things we can do to help us map the terrain of our life and see where resurrection might be needed. We should get mapping. This is important stuff.

(As an aside, think of the offertory during the Holy Eucharist: the bread and wine and the money offerings we make are brought to the altar and blessed, and they are meant to represent the offering of our lives, of everything we are, good and not so good, to be received and blessed and brought to life. We reduce it to liturgical familiarity but the truth it seeks to embody is inescapable: we are to pull out, offer, bring to God everything

we are, have been and can be, warts and all, and place it all in God's way and to do this repeatedly and everywhere and in every circumstance, so that eventually it becomes habitual and life changing).

We can't be told by anyone else *what* we are to make of the resurrection. But we really ought to see that we must make *something* of it, if ever we dare to make that Easter acclamation with an untroubled conscience.

Whatever you make of the resurrection, we can at least risk saying this: it will have something about it of rising and ascending: from the tombs of our lives and their stench; from being tied to what *was* – the past, your past and mine; from fear of one sort or another; from the desire to control or manipulate; from the fantasies we harbour; from the shame we might live with. Resurrection is known when we rise and ascend beyond the gravitational pull of ego and fear. Sometimes the launch is half hearted and we return to earth. In which case, try again.

None of these things, none of these *resurrections*, are likely to be instantaneous.

We are a work in progress, you and I. And the function of the church at its very best is to provide us with friends who nurture us in that lifelong adventure.

We each are likely to have our own hells to harrow, to enter and tame. We are likely to have times when we're invited to pass the light of heaven to our own small candle, and keep it alight by means unique to us, remembering this to be *The Light of Christ* as we navigate unenlightened and dark places. These things come our way in all weathers.

Funny, don't you think, that there are some people who loudly profess their belief in the resurrection but seem, puzzlingly, not to show its fruits in their lives?

And there are others, agnostic often about the claimed facts of the reported event that first Easter Day, who yet reveal resurrection, often unknown to themselves. In them it is no All Fools' Day hoax. Rather, it carries something undeniable.

Alleluia, we might say.
Alleluia indeed.