

## **Easter Sermon 2016**

Christ is risen! Hallelujah! We are celebrating Christ's disappearance from the grave, the promise to us that we too will escape from the grave and have eternal life. It is true. Jesus is alive for all time. The Lord of life cannot be held by death. God's victory over life and death means that new life is for us a reality.

God is a life giver, he brought about creation and the resurrection, it is his nature and his purpose to give us life. He offers us opportunity after opportunity, so that what appears to be finished he can bring newness out of.

On this day 2,000 years ago of course the disciples were still grieving, confused and perhaps, in the case of Peter, guilt ridden. He had, after all, denied Christ instead of supporting him. That is one of the encouraging and wonderful facts about the Bible. We are shown the lives and actions of ordinary people, who make mistakes, make bad decisions, struggle with faith and yet God allows us to put the past behind us and have a new life. He is

now offering us a new relationship with him, one of increased intimacy, increased communication.

Acts tells us of the early Christians being challenged to share their faith and this new intimacy more widely, to see God at work in the lives of others and to show how important the death and resurrection of Christ has been for creation.

The women were asked to remember and understand, they found it difficult just as we do sometimes. Difficult to remember that as Christians we have two great commandments to live by: "Love the Lord your God" and "Love your neighbour", difficult to understand all the mysteries of our faith. And sometimes, perhaps, just as the women did, difficult to articulate what we know and have seen in our lives.

Sometimes it is only on looking back at our lives we can suddenly see God's hand on them, even though we weren't aware of it at the time. Because God doesn't force us, he is gentle and compassionate and understanding – even as he

was with Thomas. The disciples struggled to understand, to remember what Jesus had told them about his death, to understand that it is only through death new life comes.

I can remember at Theological College one Easter when we had been in silence on Good Friday except for services and attending the Cathedral lectures, and then had spent Saturday night in a vigil in the Cathedral; that the 6.00am dawn service with bonfire, baptisms, confirmations, champagne and joy; was almost without that joy for me. I was exhausted, still stuck in the Good Friday/Holy Saturday times so I found it difficult to make the transition. That is the nearest I can come to experiencing something of what I think the disciples must have felt like that first Easter Morning. Tired, bewildered, frightened, not able to think straight. Unable quite to take in what the women were saying. How can it be that he's alive? We saw him dead. Our friend is gone, our leader is gone. Luke's Gospel starts in that darkness and despair and then leaves us with Peter wondering, 'could it be true?'

Even now, sometimes we struggle to take in the news, that we have been given a new life because Jesus died for us and rose again. He loves us so much that he died for us. It's a powerful message. Isaiah tells us that God rejoices in what he has made and delights to see us happy, so much so that he died for us that we may have eternal life with him. God sent his Son because he loves the whole world, and that includes Peter, Cornelius, you and me. Today let us grab that chance of new life, grab that chance of a new relationship with God, putting our old life behind us and embracing the new. Today we celebrate Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluiah!