

Brancepeth Sermon 4 April 2021

Easter Dawn Vigil

*Risen Christ,
by your living word this morning,
lift the graveclothes from our minds,
roll the stone from our hearts,
and raise our bodies to new life.
Amen.*

Alleluia! The Lord is risen! Alleluia!
As he told you! Alleluia! Alleluia!
It is true! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

It is *true*.

Today is the one morning in all the year
when belief comes most easily to me –
when I can most readily say, ‘It is true! He is risen indeed!’

I don’t just mean that it is the one morning in all the year
when I believe most readily that the tomb was empty,
that Jesus rose from the dead,
and that Mary’s weeping was turned to joy.

I mean that today is the one morning in all the year
when belief *in God* comes most easily to me,
when I can most readily join in
the words that in a few minutes time we will say together:
‘*This* is our faith.

We believe and trust in One God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’

When we say that -
when we say that we believe and trust in God -
what are we saying?

The most important thing that we are saying is not
that we have deduced that
there must be some kind of cosmic architect
in the background, to explain the way the world looks.

The most important thing we are saying is not
that we have deduced some kind of divine cause,
some divine initiator,
to explain why there is anything at all.

The most important thing we are doing is not
trying to explain *anything* about the way things *are*.
However important that kind of idea might be,
it get nowhere near the *heart* of what we're doing -
and it doesn't have all that much to do with *this* morning,
of all mornings.

No. When we say 'We believe and trust in God',
and especially when we say it on a morning like *this* morning,
we are saying something deeper than that, something richer, something more wonderful.

We are saying that this world we live in -
everything in it,
every *one* in it,
every one of *us*, and everyone around us -
we are saying that this whole world is *loved*.

We are saying that this world exists *because of* love,
and that it exists *for* love.

We are saying that it was loved into being,
and that it will be loved to the end.

We are saying that love is the deepest law of the world.

'God' is the name we have for the
One who so loves the world.

And when we say 'We believe and trust in God'
we are saying that we believe and trust in this love –
a love beneath everything,
a love behind everything,
a love that will never give up,
a love that will never let us go.

And yet we say that in the midst of a world
that seldom look like love's domain,
a world in which love does not seem to reign,
a world in which love is often
ignored, despised and defeated,
a world in which it often seems that love has died.

So when we say that 'We believe and trust in God',
we say it *against* all that.

These are words we often have to speak
against the world as we know it,
against the world as we see it,
against the world as we experience it.

But that is exactly why we say them.

When we say, 'We believe and trust in God',
we are proclaiming in the midst of grief
that grief will not have the last word;
we are proclaiming in the midst of hatred
that hatred will not have the last word;
we are proclaiming in the midst of violence
that violence will not have the last word;
we are proclaiming in the midst of racism
that racism will not have the last word;

we are proclaiming in the midst of misogyny
that misogyny will not have the last word;

we are proclaiming in the midst of broken relationships
that their breakdown will not have the last word;
we are proclaiming in the midst of the pandemic
that the virus will not have the last word;
we are proclaiming
in the midst of our separation from one another
that distance will not have the last word.

And we are we are proclaiming in the midst of *death*
that *death* will not have the last word.

We are proclaiming that love,
God's love, the love that made the world,
the love that can *remake* the world
- that God's love will not be defeated by any of those things.
Its power is never exhausted.
It never runs dry.
It never reaches the end of its resourcefulness.

We proclaim it *against* the way the world is;
we proclaim it in *protest* at the way the world is;
we proclaim it in joyful *defiance* of the way the world is.

God's love is
love almighty, love omnipotent,
love unstoppable, love undefeatable.

Sin and suffering and death will not have the last word
because *love wins*.

That is the deepest thing we are saying when we say that
'We believe and trust in God'

We believe and trust in the one who loves the world.

We believe and trust in God's invincible love.

We believe that *God's love wins*.

And that is why this morning,

of all the mornings of the year,

is the morning for proclaiming this truth.

Because when we say that 'We believe and trust in God'

we proclaim together that we believe and trust in *resurrection*.

We believe and trust in the one who brings

relief beyond suffering,

joy beyond grief,

life beyond death.

We believe in the *God* of resurrection.

We proclaimed it when we gathered round

the fire in the brazier, or saw it on our screens -

watching in that fire a symbol of Jesus' resurrection.

Because Jesus' Father did not let his holy one see decay,

did not leave him in the grave.

Jesus' tomb is *empty*,

his grave clothes are discarded,

and he is *alive*.

It is true! He is risen indeed!

We proclaimed God's resurrection love, then,

as we stood around the brazier,

but we also proclaimed it when we lit our little candles,

the fragile lights that we carried,

echoes of that resurrection blaze.

They are symbols of the small victories of love
that we do meet with in the midst of darkness -
temporary victories,
frail victories,
victories often all too quickly overwhelmed
and swallowed up -
but victories for all that,
candle-light echoes of the flames of resurrection:

a relationship—healed,
an injustice—undone,
a sickness—fought off,
after long absence—a reunion;
love's small victories,
snatches of the music of Jesus' resurrection
playing in our lives.

So, we proclaimed belief in God's love
at the fire in the brazier,
and we proclaimed it again as we lit our little candles,
but we proclaim it once more as the sun comes up -
the great light, the unceasing fire
the banisher of night.

We proclaim our belief in God's resurrection love
as the day's sunrise gives us
a symbol of love's awaited triumph,
love's final word:
love beyond night, love beyond pain, love beyond death,
a love everlasting -
the love of God painting the whole world with glory.

We believe that the love of God -
foreshadowed by the brazier-blaze of Jesus' resurrection,
signalled by the glow of our small candle flames -
will rise over the world *like the sun*,
turning all things to light.

That is why, this morning,
we proclaim our belief and trust in God -
because *whatever* happens,
whatever the world throws at us -
whatever victories injustice wins,
whatever nails hold our griefs in place,

in whatever graveclothes our hopes are wrapped,
however deeply we are laid in the grave,

love wins.

Alleluia! The Lord is risen! Alleluia!

As he told you! Alleluia! Alleluia!

It is true! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!