

SUNDAY APRIL 4TH 2021

EASTER DAY.

About today's Readings

Today we celebrate the central mystery and truth of our Christian faith: the resurrection of Jesus, and his triumph over the power of death. This amazing truth has transformed the world from the day it happened until now.

The Gospel reading relates the circumstances surrounding the discovery that the tomb of Jesus is empty. The three characters in this episode - Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter and the other disciple - do not immediately understand why the body of Jesus is missing; and this reading tells us that this "other disciple" (which was probably John himself) went into the tomb, saw what he saw, saw what he didn't see, and then came to believe that Jesus had risen.

There are clues in the story that God has been at work. We are told that the stone had been moved away from the front of the tomb, and that the cloth which had been over the face of Jesus was "rolled up" - this is a Biblical way of expressing divine action or intervention. The signs of death - the stone - the cloth - have been deprived of their meaning, and have the purposes which they had been there to serve, taken away from them.

No-one actually **saw** Jesus rise from the dead; but the disciples, the women, and the first preachers in the Church are all people who are witnesses - not **of** the Resurrection, but witnesses **to** the Resurrection; and their experiences of the empty tomb, and their later encounters with the risen Jesus, are the evidence on which our own belief in the risen Christ exists. The transformation which took place in the characters and personalities and in the abilities and strengths of the followers of Jesus, are themselves things which point to the truth of this amazing event.

In today's first reading, Peter is preaching to the household of the Roman centurion Cornelius. He gives an outline of the story of Jesus, and emphasises that his preaching and teaching is trustworthy, because he has experienced the risen Jesus for himself. And Peter invites his hearers to become witnesses, too, to the truth of the Resurrection.

We are invited to experience the risen Jesus in our lives, too. Being "risen" with Christ isn't just about what we hope will happen to us when we die. It is about life as we know it now, becoming transformed and taking on an entirely new outlook and dimension - and about growing to an understanding that in his resurrection Jesus has set free the whole of creation. This can give us joy now, as well as hope for the future. We all hope to share in the Resurrection of Jesus - but Jesus said to Martha "**I AM** the Resurrection and the life ..." in other words, his risen life, and sharing in his risen life, is about doing so in the present - doing so NOW - and not just as something to hope for later.

So - do you have the strength to live as witnesses to the truth of Jesus' resurrection, and to bear witness to what you believe by the way you live, by the things you say, by the values you adhere to, and by the way you treat others?

Some prayers for today, and for the week ahead.

We give thanks for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; for the hope it brings us for the future; and for the opportunities and transformations which it brings to us now. May we live as those who have been raised with him; and may the transformation in our characters and in our personalities and attitudes be so apparent as to be the means by which other people are also transformed, and enabled to share in resurrection hope and joy.

We pray for ELIZABETH our Queen; for all in authority under her; for all in public life and in positions of influence and power; and for all who are driving the political and the medical agendas for us, and for our country and for the wider world. We pray that new life and new hope may be experienced by all people who live in danger or in need; and that as an Easter people, the Church may bring joy and hope into the hearts of all people.

We continue to pray for all who are working in hospitals and in Intensive Care to nurse those most seriously affected by the pandemic; and for medical practices, hospitals, emergency services and front-line carers everywhere. We look forward to the gradual easing of some of the restrictions with which we have all been living; and we pray for restraint and sense, and a care and respect for the safety of others, as we embrace new freedoms in a responsible way.

We pray for all who are on holiday at this time; for the safety of all who have to travel; and for those who have still to remain distanced and separated and isolated from their families and friends.

We pray for the police, the judiciary, and all forces of law and order; and we pray that the current issues of safety in the community, and the dangers of violence and attack, and racial and social harmony, may be addressed in ways which make a positive and lasting difference to our national debate, to our national life, and to every individual.

We pray for the sick: Anne Barber, Beth Beecham, Gerry Bond, Anne Carter, Lizzie Checkley, Carole Cresswell, Janet Dann, Peter Davey, Sue Davis, Carolyn Drew, Julie Evans, Kieran Hooper, Jill, Jules, Rene Leufgen, Jack Luscombe, Jackie Lynch, Mike Hammett, Pamela Macey, Diane Squires, Kathryn Tregenna, Lena Tucker, Verity, Glyn Walker and Rita White.

We pray for those who have died recently, including those who have died of the Covid-19 Pandemic locally here, and also in any part of the world. We remember especially Frances Ann Bowden whose funeral has recently taken place at St. Martin's. And we also pray for those whose anniversary of death falls at this time, among them Ted Ellis, (1988); Amy Karen Hunt, (1993); Eva Joslin, (1986); and Derrick Albert Lingwood, Priest and first Vicar of this parish, (1972).