

Alleluia. Christ is risen

## **He is risen indeed, alleluia**

The Bible does not treat that as an ancient philosophical principle or a neat piece of liturgy we bring out once a year. It treats it as an event that spills out into ordinary life and changes the way people live. We hear that most clearly in the first Christian sermon recorded in the book of Acts. Peter stands up and speaks to the crowd in Jerusalem and he tells them something astonishing: the Jesus who was crucified has been raised by God. Peter does not speak like someone explaining a metaphor. He speaks like someone describing something that has happened. Something has shifted in the world. Resurrection, for Peter, is not poetry. It is the turning point of history.

And yet the Gospel reading shows us that resurrection is not always easy to believe, even for the people who were closest to Jesus. Thomas is honest about his doubt. When the others tell him they have seen the Lord, he does not simply accept their testimony. He wants to see for himself. He wants to touch the wounds. He wants to know that this is really the same Jesus who was crucified. Thomas reminds us that resurrection faith is not naïve optimism. It grows out of real questions, real uncertainty, and real encounters. When the risen Christ finally stands before him, Thomas does not receive a lecture. He receives an invitation: “Put your finger here. See my hands.” Resurrection is not about ignoring the wounds of the world. The risen Christ still bears them.

We’re going to hear a lot from Peter in these few weeks. He won’t be preaching a sermon but writing a letter to scattered Christians who are facing hardship, a generation on from the Easter moment.

### *1 Peter 1:1-12*

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.*

Phew! Breathless and exciting isn't it! He speaks of joy, glory, salvation, inheritance — words that pile on top of one another as if he can hardly contain what he wants to say. He even says that this hope is something into which angels long to look. The resurrection of Jesus has opened something vast, something that stretches from the prophets of Israel all the way into the future God is preparing. Peter does not pretend that the people he writes to are living easy lives. In fact he acknowledges that they are suffering various trials. Their faith, he says, is being tested like gold in fire. Resurrection does not remove hardship from the Christian life. Instead it gives that hardship a different horizon. Because Christ has been raised, suffering is no longer the last word. Because Christ lives, the future of the world is not closed.

And yet if we are honest, most of us do not walk around feeling as if we are living permanently in that brightness. Some days hope feels strong and steady. Other days it feels thin and uncertain. Peter seems to know that as well. The hope he speaks about is not the absence of struggle. It is the confidence that struggle does not define the end of the story. Perhaps that is why the season of spring gives us such a helpful picture. Nothing bursts into full flower overnight. There is pruning and planting. Seeds lie buried in dark soil before anything green appears above the ground. Hope often grows quietly like that. Slowly. Patiently. Almost invisibly.

In this opening week, the Acts and John readings place resurrection in concrete motion. Peter interprets Easter as God's decisive moment; and Thomas meets the risen Christ in person. Resurrection is not an idea but the theatre in which the church's great drama unfolds. It is the source of the hope into which the community is born and by which it is sustained. So the threshold we cross today is resurrection expanding into living hope. The when Jesus rose, he opened a future that did not exist before. Don't worry about trying to grasp the resurrection. Focus instead on embracing hope.

God who awakens each spring of our lives, you have given us new birth into a living hope by raising Jesus Christ from the dead: root that hope deeply in the soils of our own times and seasons, that we may live with joy in the life you have begun; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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