

## Easter Re-creation

More than any other seasons of the year, Lent and Holy Week draw our attention to how brokenness and beauty, horror and hope, death and life dwell intimately together.

If you can remember, all the way back to Ash Wednesday, we marked the beginning of this bittersweet season with ash - the first sign and symbol of Lent. We received the sign of the cross in ash, and heard those evocative words:

'Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. Turn away from your sin and be faithful to Christ.'

We have been reminded throughout that Death is never far from us, and we are encouraged to prepare for it, to recognize that what God creates and graces and blesses may well be beset and broken and will eventually die.

And just these last few days, as we have drawn towards the end of Holy Week, we see Christ himself beset and broken, in as much agony in the Garden of Gethsemane as upon the cross, as he himself faces the full force and horror of death.

Death is allowed to do its worst in him - not only in the form of physical pain, but in the terror and desolation with which Jesus approaches it. He lets go of everything, even the hope that God will intervene to spare him.

Easter is not about denying death, and the resurrection doesn't make Christ's death on the cross unreal.

Death is exactly what the artists and scientists say: it is a full stop to human growth and response, it is night falling on everything we value or understand or hope for.

The fear of death is only natural, and so is grief at the death of another (Jesus, remember, shed tears for the death of a friend). As we begin to celebrate Easter we mustn't attempt to trivialize it or avoid it or deny its seriousness. When we look at death, we look at something that can destroy anything in our universe....  
But not God, its maker and redeemer.

Easter is about God overcoming death. Today we see God's creative word can never be stifled or silenced. The resurrection is not about how Jesus survived death or how the spirit of Jesus outlived his mortal body; it is about Christ dying, going down into the deepest darkness and the dissolving of all things, but then being called again out of that nothingness.

Easter Day, as so many have said, is the first day of creation all over again. It is a new creation story. Think back for a moment to our gospel reading, John is a stickler for detail: it's the first day of the week, and Mary thinks she's talking to a gardener.

One man, one woman, in a garden, only Christ is the gardener who creates this new garden of Eden - a whole new world, a completely new life, beyond the fear of death, beyond the limitations of our mortal bodies, beyond the fragility of our decaying world. Celebrating Easter is celebrating the creator - celebrating God's creative love and purpose for us all.

And so in a few moments we will renew our baptismal vows. At baptism, God calls each one of us by name. We are his beloved creation. Today, on this day of resurrection, we celebrate God's renewed call on our lives.

Again think back to the gospel reading. Jesus calls out the name of the woman whom he finds weeping by his tomb. Mary.

At the sound of her name, she finally sees and knows who has found her there. It is a stunning moment of recognition. With an inflection that only Christ could have given to it, his speaking her name conveys everything: all their history, all that has passed between them, all that they have been through and all that they have shared. He knows her. He loves her. And now he speaks to her to reassure her and to redirect her.

The creative word of God that has not been stifled or silenced speaks and says her name.

Mary.

In that moment, Mary is changed, she is transformed - she is a new creation, and she is now at the start of a new relationship with Christ.

Not long ago Christ had released her from the demons that haunted her, and now he releases her again, only this time from clinging to him and her past. He sees her path and her life lie elsewhere: beyond this moment, beyond this garden, beyond what she has known.

And so the resurrection is not the end of the story, it is only just the beginning. Just as we marked the beginning of Lent, by making the sign of the cross, to remind us all of our mortality, I invite you later to mark the beginning of Easter, by making the sign of the cross only this time not with ash, but with holy water from the font, to recall your new life in Christ.

I pray that as you do, you will hear Christ's life giving word to you, that you will hear him call your name.

And as you leave this holy place today, may you know in your heart that you have been changed and transformed by his love, and like Mary, tell all the world the good news.

Alleluia. Christ is Risen.

**Tim**