

## A Reflection for Easter Day 2021 from Revd Ali

Happy Easter! Jesus is risen! Alleluia!

It's hard to believe that it has been a year since we spent last Easter in lockdown. Unable to gather in our churches. Unable to spend time with our family and friends. It's been a long and very painful year of pandemic, but we have the hope that we are starting to come out of it. We have the hope of a resurrection to some kind of normality. There have been so many things that we all have missed during the pandemic, one of them being the ability to freely travel.

Ordinarily, I love to travel, visiting new places, meeting new people, enjoying a new culture. It is such a privilege to go somewhere and experience a different way of life. A few years ago we were fortunate to visit the Seychelles, a gorgeous place, with lovely people and a fabulous climate. One day we explored part the rainforest in the interior of the island. It was an amazing place. Tall trees filled with exotic birds, incredible foliage and huge spiders! Most of the time we were looking upwards, where the life was, where the green canopy was waving against the bright blue sky. My husband Pete is a keen photographer, so as he was concentrating on getting good shots, I wandered further along the path. Suddenly I was all alone, the only noise was the gentle stirring of the breeze in the trees. I sat on a rock and looked down. The rainforest floor was brown, but as I started to look at the expanse of brown - so different to the profusion of greens above - I realised that it was anything but uniform. The layers of dead leaves, seed pods and fallen branches were actually quite beautiful. The complexity of the different textures and shapes were stunning. The more I looked, the more I saw the promise of new life in the kaleidoscope of texture. The death of the leaves and seed pods necessary for new life. The detritus providing the energy and environment for new life. Death bringing forth life.

It is something that we all experience at this time of year. The spring flowers bringing back colour and scent after the sparsity of winter. The intensely green leaves coming back onto the trees. Life coming again from the seemingly dead, bare branches of just a few weeks ago. The hope of the resurrection joyfully on show for us all to see.

I wonder if it felt like winter for Mary as she went to the tomb that day. Just a week before everything was light, bright, cheerful and happy. Her friend and teacher Jesus, had been welcomed into Jerusalem with waving palms and hosannas,. But now everything was desolate. Everything had changed from the bright spring green joy of Palm Sunday to the bare, grey, deathly quiet after the crucifixion. Mary, struggling with the deep sadness of seeing the man that she loved, that she, like many of her friends, thought was the answer to all their hopes and prayers die such a painful and horrific death. The devastation of her grief must have been almost overwhelming. So she does the only thing that she can think of, she goes to be close to him.

When we are deep in grief, it can seem as if all the colour had been drained from the world, we wonder how, after our loved one had died, that the earth can still be turning, how the sun continues to rise and then set when they are gone. I wonder if that is the place where Mary was that morning.

Yet in the darkness, in the grief and confusion, new life was stirring. Mary went to the tomb, carrying the weight of her grief, but in her love and devotion we see the glimmers of what was to come – an indication that the power of love endures beyond the darkness of death. She found the stone had been rolled away. She must have been fearful and confused. What did it mean? So she runs to tell Jesus' friends what has happened.

Peter and the other disciple ran to the tomb to see for themselves what had happened. The other disciple looked into the tomb, he hesitated on the threshold, wavering between doubt and faith, grief and joy, fear and amazement. The stone may have been rolled away, but the barriers to belief still needed to be removed.

Dare we go to that place ourselves? To look into the tomb, experience the reality of death, our own mortality, and believe that Jesus has broken those chains, and speaks into our fear?

Peter pushed past the other disciple who hesitated on the threshold. Peter dared to go in, and we are told 'he saw and believed'. Doubt and fear turned into faith by his experience of the empty tomb.

I wonder if we too sometimes hover on the threshold of faith. Are we prepared to come and see for ourselves? Are we prepared to take that step of faith and allow ourselves to see and believe? Even if, as for the disciples, it may take us a lifetime to work out just what the new life offered by Jesus is all about?

Meanwhile, Mary is still locked in her grief, 'they have taken my Lord away'. But what Mary doesn't realize is that Jesus is standing next to her. Even in *our* darkest moments, Jesus is standing alongside us too. Sometimes it takes a while for us to be able to recognize his presence, to come to that place where we are able to hear him speaking our name. Calling us out of the darkness of fear, sin and grief, into the dawn of new life.

When Jesus speaks Mary's name all the darkness and grief fall away. It is him, it is Jesus, he is alive! It is in that moment when he calls her by name that she sees him for who he really is. The risen Christ! Life has come out of death, joy from grief, light from darkness, truth from confusion. He is alive! Suddenly, the world is a brighter place, the desolation of winter is turned instantly into the joy of spring.

The miracle is that Jesus calls each of us by name. It may be that we are too busy, too bound by the expectations of the world or too deep in grief to hear him call our name. But Jesus wants to draw us into relationship with him so continues to call. It is in that moment of hearing his voice, of recognizing who he is that we receive the promise of new life. The love that never lets us go. The removal of the barriers of sin, doubt and fear that have separated us from God. The barriers that have prevented us from believing that we are known to God by name and loved by God for all eternity. A new way of loving, of living and being has been opened up to us because Jesus has been raised from death to life.

Because Jesus lives, we live. He calls us by name to follow him into a new dawn, a new beginning. Death does not have the last word. We are no longer lost in the winter of our sin and pain. We are made new. We are set free.

For the message of Jesus is this; the message of resurrection Sunday is this: it doesn't end with despair, it doesn't end with humiliation, it doesn't end here. The story continues with resurrection, it continues with hope, it continues with forgiveness, it continues with freedom. This is a new beginning; in Jesus all is made new. For Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia