

Easter Reflections 2021 – St Mary’s and St Augustine’s Church

Readings: Isaiah 26: 6-9; Mark 16.1-8; Psalm 118 1-2, 14-24.

Our Easter Reflection is written by Claire

There is a story I have read recently about a lake that had been transformed from a stagnant pond to a place of tranquillity and beauty.

“The stale stagnant smell had been the overwhelming thing, the grey scum on the thick polluted water, the rubbish and the hopeless ugliness ... it was silted up lifeless ... and stinking of decay. As she perched on the stone, she could see a supermarket trolley sticking out of the oozing mud ... a wave of despair washed over her.” In the story we don’t get to know the woman’s name, but she attempts on her own to clean up the pond: “It doesn’t have to be like this” she exclaims, “It can be changed”. But her own attempts are thwarted until she encounters a stranger at the lake, a woman old and bent over, she said: “You’ll never do it on your own love ... you need some help”. Over the weeks and months others joined the two women and surely and slowly the lake was transformed. “It was beautiful. The grass the wildflowers waved down to the edge of the lapping blue water ... the supermarket trolley now a gleaming flower basket by the stone. The old woman now a faithful companion who had taken part in and could also see the transformation: “You’d never have done it on your own, but it is beautiful. It really is” (From ‘The Lake Transformed’ In, The Well Within by Simon Bailey, 1996, DLT).

The collect for Easter Eve resonates with the woman’s exclamation that ‘it does not have to be like this’, that ‘change is possible’. “Give light in our darkness we cry and bring us out of the prison of our despair”. We don’t want this to go on anymore ... help us, save us, rescue us!! It doesn’t have to be like this!!! There is a shift which occurs over the time span of the Easter Vigil. Then, as the ‘cock crows’ at the break of day ... “when the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him” (Mark 16.1). Their thoughts were about who would roll the stone away from the opening of the tomb so that they could go and anoint Jesus’ body. They would have been consumed with grief, the smell of death visceral, like the stagnant pond.

There are moments in all of our lives when we face something, a situation, a life event that can halt us in our tracks and we feel we will never recover. Or, ‘How can this possibly be redeemed?’ ... ‘How can any good come from any of this?’ It is not a unique human experience and we can find echoes of this throughout the Psalms and the prophets. What is interesting and surprising about the story of the transformation of the lake is that the woman thought she could do it all on her own but, the task was insurmountable. Yes, the lake could be transformed but not in the way she was going about it. “You’ll never do it on your own love ... You need some help”, the older woman said. It would not have been possible for the women who went to the tomb to roll away the stone, they would have needed some help. Within our own lives we will find that there is a way through for us but perhaps not how we thought, we cannot do it all on our own or all our own way, we need some help!

The transformation of the lake provides an image for us of the resurrection. In the words of the Collect, now for Easter Day, “by the raising of your Son you have broken the chains of death and hell ... a new day has dawned”. We sense the resurrection at this time of year, it is all around us; as the earth warms up and the blossom breaks on the trees. The heat and the warmth of the sun more noticeable and the blossom more vibrant because of the circumstances that the world is gripped in at this time. What is also more apparent to us are the injustices in the world. The continuing violence in Myanmar; our own Government’s ‘white-washing’ of the recent race report; the report into Sheffield Cathedral highlighting a culture of bullying and fear. Our cry should be it doesn’t have to be like this!!! It is possible to change, for things to be different. But I suspect we shall find if we try to do this all on our own we shall not succeed. Change is possible, but so often not in the way that we perceived.

For resurrection to occur there needs to be a letting go. A letting go of our own control of situations and circumstance. An emptying of our own ego ... allowing ourselves to journey with the women to the tomb carrying our ointments and spices, to tend our wounds. We expect to be met by an insurmountable bolder, by the stench of death but, that it where our story is interrupted, that is where the ending of our narrative is changed. We may think that the resurrection was an event in history an happening on a hillside an occurrence and that was the miracle. But the miracle is the quiet unfolding of the resurrection promise within the internal landscape of our own lives which is then reflected outwards into the world and the Church. It is the internal healing of the parts of us that we felt were unredeemable or may be that we never really knew were broken. Somehow on Easter Day we find ourselves with the women inside the empty tomb starring at the place where the body was laid: "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here" (Mark 16 .6). It is a healing, a transformation, a metamorphosis beyond what for ourselves was humanly possible. But in the early hours of the morning on Easter Day as dawn breaks, we find that our lives are also caught up within the Easter mystery. "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118.23-24).

The shopping trolley had been discarded in the lake, as the lake was restored the shopping trolley was removed but then a new use was found for it. It was cleaned and the basket planted with flowers. As we enter into the mystery of this Easter season we will be surprised by joy, as we follow in the footsteps of Christ the just and merciful. "The way of the righteous is level; O Just One, you make smooth the path of the righteous." (Isaiah. 26.7). We shall find that 'it doesn't have to be like this' and that 'things can be changed' and that importantly we can be changed also!

With love and blessings and prayers for a holy and joyous Easter. Alleluia He is risen ... He is risen indeed Alleluia!

Claire x

Resurrection – what next?

When we pick up the threads of our torn dreams,
And piece together the tattered bits of our lives
To make a different future for ourselves:

In hope and faith the mending of life goes on.

When we stagger to our feet after yet another fall,
And take more faltering steps along our path
To follow the way of struggle and love:

In hope and faith we journey one.

When hostilities cease and reconciliation begins,
And we start to speak in the same language
To work towards common understanding for the future:

In hope and faith the sharing of life goes on.

When hope offers us the terror of new possibility,
And we turn from the certainty of despair
To look for new ways of living and following:

In hope and faith the risk of life goes on.

Jan Berry

Collect for Easter Eve

In the depths of our isolation
We cry to you, Lord God:
Give light in our darkness
And bring us out of the prison of our despair;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Collect for Easter Day

God of glory,
By the rising of your Son
You have broken the chains of death and
hell:
Fill your Church with faith and hope;
For a new day has dawned
And the way to life stands open
In our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.