

EASTER SUNDAY'25

I am in a poetic mood this Easter! Last night, at our first celebration of Easter at our wonderful Vigil in Great Bealings, I shared George Herbert's 'Easter Song'. This morning I have chosen another priest-poet, Charles Kingsley, and his hymn-like poem, 'Easter Week':

See the land, her Easter keeping,
Rises as her Maker rose.
Seeds, so long in darkness sleeping,
Burst at last from winter snows.
Earth with heaven above rejoices;
Fields and gardens hail the spring;
Shaughs and woodlands ring with voices,
While the wild birds build and sing.

You, to whom your Maker granted
Powers to those sweet birds unknown,
Use the craft by God implanted;
Use the reason not your own.
Here, while heaven and earth rejoices,
Each his Easter tribute bring-
Work of fingers, chant of voices,
Like the birds who build and sing.

Now most of you will know why I have chosen such an apt poem for us here this year. We have had our own very friendly Lenten visitor in our porch at St Mary's. We have not only watched the building of our own robin's nest in the historic Sayer's charity bread container, we have witnessed eggs hatching and new birth chirping on our doorstep as if to say 'we'll show you what the resurrection of Christ is like' – it is nature reborn, re-kindled, our springtime of the year to share with you...so 'Sing up' like we do'!

I have also chosen this poem as a reflection on Mary's encounter with someone she first thought was the gardener. She was understandably sad about the last agonising days, fearful that perhaps someone had even stolen the body of Jesus, but after a few simple questions and answers, the penny drops. She was the first to see the Risen Lord, the One who only days before, she had anointed on her knees with her hair. She couldn't quite take everything in but her heart was racing when she discovered and recognised Her Lord and Ours. And I see another, deeper layer of meaning in our familiar Gospel text, or do I mean, irony?

It is something I have seen in many an icon. That yes, the Risen Lord was a gardener too, the new Adam, who through God's grace had brought new life and a new song into the world, which began with this very personal encounter with Mary – whose tears finally became tears of joy and hope. We can say confidently now, Christ has trampled death and overcome it, gloriously. He is risen from the dead, Alleluia! Is it no wonder that the fourth/fifth century Easter Song of Praise (the Exsultet) was at the very centre of our liturgy last night and why today's Paschal Candle also represents the Risen Christ for all to see?

What we are trying to do today and every Sunday in Eastertide is to share something of that first momentous Easter joy which Mary must have felt, the beauty and joy of seeing Jesus again and starting out again on a new, fresh, and flowering pilgrimage of faith. Jesus didn't revisit Pilate's headquarters to settle old scores or claim any kind of kingly superiority. No, it is as if he wanted to slip back into our lives as if he never went away, because we are His friends. It is as if he wanted us to literally experience rebirth and renewal once and for all and the delightful and glorious garden of the Resurrection was where it all first began.

We live today with that wonderful Easter memory and gift because we, too, are called to be 'Easter people' like Mary, in a very sad and disillusioned world and, I have to admit sadly, in a very disheartened Church of England. The need for new life or leadership never goes away; the need to walk alongside the victims of abuse never goes away; something I learnt very powerfully this year with our Cathedral Lent course, is not to be glib about 'saying sorry' when something much more is needed...

Perhaps our friendly robins are trying to tell us something really quite plain and simple – we have to build well before we can sing; we have to nurture new life and encourage new commitment to the many vocations and adventures offered by this shared faith of ours. 'Each their Easter tribute bring' Charles Kingsley is saying.

Please don't say you cannot help grow the kingdom because you're not green-fingered! Please don't leave the many tasks and needs of our own Christian community to the same few people. We are all in this garden and community of the Resurrection together, side by side, cheek by jowl, woven together as sisters and brothers and beloved, by the same Risen Lord. There is so much to be thankful for and those of you already signed up to rediscover C.S.Lewis' 'Mere Christianity' will learn there is nothing 'mere' at all about the faith and Lord we love, serve and follow; rather we are inspired, energised, and challenged by the author and I quote: "to look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him, **everything else thrown in.**"

A very happy and Blessed Easter to you all!
Amen.

