

Easter Day

THE WELL OF SALVATION

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
Isaiah 12.3

I used to live in a house which had a well in the garden. A well is a good thing to have: cool and deep, and a bit mysterious. There is something that draws us to lean over the well-head and look down listening to the echo of your voice. waiting for the splash as a drop in a pebble. And at the bottom: water: life-giving and refreshing.

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem; he knew about wells. Jerusalem depended on them just like many places in the world today. Their life-giving water was so important that he likened God's favour to drawing waters from a well: 'with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation'. Like a well, God can be relied on: his grace will never run dry; he is deep and refreshing. He gives life just like the water from a well.

But it can't have seemed like that to the disciples as they gathered together after the crucifixion behind locked doors because they were afraid. Where was God's overflowing grace now? How could their time with the One who promised them living waters have ended like this? The well of salvation had run dry.

And then - imagine the scene - on that first Easter morning there came, suddenly an urgent knocking at the door. They ask who it is. Mary of Magdala replies: 'Its me and Mary and Salome. Let us in!'

The door is opened... it is them... the three women pale with fright. The disciples fearing the worst close the door again quickly and fasten the bolts - the women may have been followed.

Its some time before they are calm enough to tell their story. The tomb was open... the stone rolled away... with hearts beating they looked inside... they are dumbfounded... the tomb is filled with light... an angel speaks to them: 'Fear not. Jesus whom you seek is not here;; He has risen!'

The story seemed incredible and no one believed them. And then that same evening Jesus appears among them. Their eyes tell them that their hearts want to believe: He is risen indeed! *It is true.* The well of salvation has not run dry.

Just like a well there is a deep mystery about the resurrection. In restoring life where life was lost we encounter the unknowable depths of God. The mystery of God is something we can experience, but it is not something we can understand. As with the two Mary's and Salome, and as with the disciples in the upper room, in the resurrection God confronts us with an experience and challenges us to build it into our understanding of life.

We miss the fullness of what God did in the resurrection if we think of it simply as something that happened to Jesus. Resurrection is God's way in the world. We see now all around us the signs of springtime, the signs of new life following the death of winter. The seed must perish is the plant is to grow, but in the plant we see all the potential in the seed given expression and brought to full flower. The cycle of nature is from life, through death to new life. We see the same pattern in our own lives. We only mature through the painful process of growth: dying to childish things in order to embrace the adventure of youth, and then dying to that to grow into adulthood. Immaturity is not so much because we have not grown but because we have not properly died. And then growth in adult life will mean enduring less and suffering the so called little deaths which prepare us for our final journey into God. Again the pattern is from life, through death to new life.

Sometimes we look back on these experiences of growth and say 'I didn't know what kept me going.' Easter makes plain what is

otherwise just a puzzle. God is in these experiences, the dying and the new life. God comes to us in our depths, just as he did to those first disciples in the depths of their despair. God *is* the well that never runs dry; God is the ever widening vision, the ever-flowing stream. Out of despair he brings hope; out of defeat he brings victory. And we believe that in the end his hope will be fulfilled; his victory will be complete.

Just as a stream will eventually overcome every obstacle that is put in its path, so will the overflowing love of God overcome all that is opposed to it. We can resist or we can go with the flow. Even though our everyday experience points to the truth of the way of resurrection from life, through death to new life, we can make a turning point into a sticking point, hardening our hearts in tough times, refusing to let go childish ideas, stubbornly rejecting the new, failing to accept that there is no growth without pain. If we want to experience the depth of the love of God we have to let go, just as Jesus let go in Gethsemane and on the Cross, and just as the disciples let go in the upper room. Then, and only then, will the love of God flood over us and the waters bear us up. It is by letting go and letting God, that we experience his mystery and draw on his depths. In this way maybe we can see the importance of the death of Jesus. His resurrection is the sign that God is in the ordinary cycle of life, and that in the end nothing is able to separate us from his love. Through the resurrection God says to us, 'yes you can trust me with your life.'

So turn to him; trust in him; be not afraid; and with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation!

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!