

FOLLOW ME

The Way of Jesus in a World of Conflict



Meditations for Holy Week

Peter Sills

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in a
World of Conflict*

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Cover image

Jesus washes the feet of his disciples

by Albert Edelfeld

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Foreword

Holy Week is the single most important week in the Christian year, when we follow Jesus from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem through the desolation of his crucifixion on Calvary, his death and burial, to the joy of the Resurrection on Easter Day. It is a journey that gains in meaning as it is repeated, and because of this it is important that Christians make it every year. Holy Week is simply too important to let other things, other claims on our time, get in the way: as Jesus set his mind to go to Jerusalem and face the fate that awaited him, so all who seek to follow him, and base their lives on his life, need to make the same journey in heart and mind.

This year, 2022, we make that journey against the background of a world in conflict. As I write the war in Ukraine dominates the news, taking attention away from the equally brutal and destructive wars in Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia and Myanmar, and other conflicts in Africa, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. It has also diverted attention from domestic unrest caused by the scandalous gap between the haves and the have-nots. The grossly unequal society that has resulted provides fertile ground for social conflict and the rise of the political right with its nationalistic agenda of difference and discrimination – a world completely at odds with the Good News that Jesus proclaimed.

In these meditations, given at Holy Trinity Church, Hurstpierpoint in Sussex, I ask: What does the example of Jesus in the final week of his life say to a world consumed by conflict?

Peter Sills
Holy Week, 2022

MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

DEVOTION

Read: Isaiah 42.1–9 / Mark 14.1–11

WE celebrate Holy Week this year against the background of a world in conflict – seen most obviously and brutally the war in Ukraine and in the continuing wars in Syria, Yemen and Ethiopia, but seen also in the growing social conflicts created by a deeply unequal world. Suffering, destruction and death; strife, division and discrimination, are becoming normalised. Christians are not alone in condemning this, but Christians ought to be especially concerned because we seek to live by the example of Jesus who saw the world very differently, and whose life and teaching offer a better way. What does the example of Jesus, particularly in the final week of his life, say to a world consumed by conflict?

We begin in Bethany, at the house of Simon the Leper, where Jesus has come for supper. During the meal, a woman comes in and anoints Jesus with a very costly perfume – Mark says she anointed his head; John says his feet. Mark does not say who she was, but she must have been someone whose life had been deeply touched by Jesus. Maybe, as John says, she was Mary of Bethany, whose brother, Lazarus, Jesus had raised from the dead; so I will call her Mary. As she poured the costly perfume over Jesus the other guests were indignant: ‘Why this waste?’ they protested. ‘The perfume might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor.’ And they began to scold her. Their reaction is understandable, but they had missed the point, and Jesus will have none of it. ‘Leave her alone,’ he said, ‘Why make trouble for her? It is a fine thing she has done for me.’ And he added, perhaps surprisingly to our ears: ‘You have the poor among you always, and you can help them whenever you like;

but you will not always have me.’ And then he interprets her action: ‘She has done what lay in her power; she has anointed my body in anticipation of my burial.’ In saying this, Jesus invites those around the table to look beyond the deed to the reality to which it points (the same invitation implicit in Jesus’ miracles).

Mary’s action was an overflowing act of love and devotion that came from her heart. She gave to God the most precious thing she possessed. It was an act of worship, an act that expressed deep feelings of love and gratitude. Through it she said to Jesus, ‘You are my all. My relationship with you comes first; it is the most precious thing in my life.’ When Jesus commended her, he said, in effect, ‘She has done what I would have done. She has put God first.’ It’s what he said in the Sermon the Mount: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and everything else will be added unto you.’ (*Matthew* 6.33) In other words, strive to make real in your lives the kingly rule of God and his justice, and everything else will fall into place.

Getting ourselves right with God comes first, and all today’s conflicts arise from our failure to do that. There is a service higher than serving our own interests, even than serving the poor – a higher service that ensures our hearts are opened to hear God’s demand for justice which alone ensures that the poor are properly served. The condition of the poor is a measure of the justice of our society. In today’s managerial state all too often are the poor are spoken *about*, and spoken *for*, but not spoken *with* – and really listened to. They are denied effective participation in society, and this lies at the heart of the deeply felt anger over the fire at Grenfell Tower; it lies too, behind the inhuman treatment of immigrants and the wholly inadequate response to needs of Ukrainian refugees.

Turning from Mary to the guests, we see the response of those who have grasped only part of the truth. Luke says Simon was a pharisee, in which case he, and maybe the other guests also, would have been scrupulous in observing the law, weighing out their tithes of mint, dill and cummin, but perhaps less scrupulous in their concern for justice (*cf. Matthew* 23.23–24). Their reaction to Mary’s loving act shows that,

unlike her, they had not let their faith touch their hearts. What they believed in their minds, they did not feel in their hearts. Their inner and outer lives remained apart. And this personal conflict also lies behind the conflicts of the world – and indeed the conflicts of our personal lives: we simply haven't got it together, unlike Mary.

Down the centuries God's prophets have called for more integrated lives, where faith moves from our heads to our hearts. Isaiah was one of them, and we heard his prophecy of the Servant of God who would show us what an integrated life would look like, with devotion to God at its heart. Integrated lives are basic to the realisation of justice. The justice that the Servant would bring to the nations will be seen, Isaiah says, in giving effect to God's special concern for the poor. The Servant will not break 'a bruised reed', and he will 'bring out from prison those who sit in darkness' – that is, he will have compassion on the weak and vulnerable. Isaiah describes this as the new work of God: '...new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.' Isaiah's prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus; he was the sign of God's new things, a sign of what the world would look like if, like Mary, we put God first and offered him our devotion and our most precious gifts. Jesus calls to us, 'Follow me.



TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

FELLOWSHIP

Read: Isaiah 49.1–7 / Mark 14.12–25

DURING Holy Week we hear Isaiah's prophecies about the Servant of God, a figure to which the first Christians went back in order to understand what God was doing in Jesus. Today, we heard how the Servant's rôle was transformed from gathering Israel to the LORD to gathering all nations. God says to his Servant: 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation might reach to the ends of the earth.' The Servant is to serve all peoples, and at the Last Supper, Jesus' words over the cup of wine echoed this universal rôle: 'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, *shed for many*.' The Eucharist is the sacrament of the New Covenant, a covenant that inaugurated a universal fellowship in which the equally universal social barriers of race, class and gender are overcome. As Paul said in his Letter to the Christians of Galatia: 'You have all put on Christ like a garment. There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus.' (*Galatians 3.28*)

Jesus was noted, or notorious – depending on your point of view – for the company he kept, eating with sinners and tax-collectors, those who for the scribes and Pharisees were outcasts, well beyond the social pale. So shocked were they that they protested to the disciples: 'Why does your teacher eat with such scum?' (*New Living Translation*)

Even so, there were Pharisees who did invite him to dinner, like Simon the Leper, so, clearly, some glimpsed what he was truly about. Sharing a common meal is a sign of fellowship, a sign of unity and

peace, so whom you share a meal with is not just a matter of convenience; it says something important about you. When the Son of God shares a meal with those whom society rejects he says to them: 'You are as precious to God as everyone else. You are not beyond his love or his forgiveness.'

The fellowship of Jesus is like a family; it consists of those whom we have been given, not chosen; and as a family is united by descent from a common ancestor, so we are united by our common relationship to Jesus. This is a powerful message in a world that has become dominated by the politics of identity. Ideology is now less important than identity. What we want to know not what someone believes, but whether they are 'one of us?' We turn away from those who are different, whether it be because of race or religion, class or nationality. A lot of the Brexit debate was couched in these terms; so too the rhetoric of Donald Trump and his slogan *Make America great again*; we see its popular appeal in the re-election of Viktor Orban in Hungary, and in the campaign of Marie Le Pen in France. We see it in reverse in Putin's justification of the war in Ukraine: reclaiming by force those who have turned away from 'us'.

Isaiah would not have been happy with the politics of identity. He condemned those who looked down on others saying, 'Keep to yourself; do not come near me, for I am holier than you!' Such people, he said, are smoke in God's nostrils (*Isaiah 65.5*). But Israel had not heeded his words, and in Jesus' day the politics of identity shaped society, with the vast majority of the people condemned as beyond the pale. Jesus utterly rejected this. In God's kingdom there are no outcasts; none are holier than others. The politics of identity are a denial of the truth of God; they work against the fellowship that Jesus came to create, a fellowship based on the principle of *Shalom*, the foundation of Israelite society. *Shalom* is usually translated 'peace', but it's more than that. *Shalom* is the presence of justice, not just the absence of conflict; *shalom* describes a society in which everybody's interests are taken seriously; a society in which the movers and the

shakers are no more special than the moved and the shaken; a society where we are defined by our common humanity, not by our wealth, status, race, creed or gender. The kingly rule of God overcomes all barriers. We are all in it together, as the symbolism of the shared meal makes plain: to share a loaf is to share the same blessing; to share a cup is to share the same fate.

As Jesus shares his last meal with his disciples he inaugurates the new community in which there are no walls of separation; no distinctions based on race, class or gender; no concern for who is acceptable and who is not. As he breaks the bread, Jesus says to all: 'Come and feast with me; come and enjoy a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to which all are invited.' As he blesses the cup – his blood given for the forgiveness of sins – he reminds us that we are a community of forgiven sinners, and that is what unites us. High or low, rich or poor, strong or weak, native or foreigner, we are not saved by our merits but by God's forgiveness.

And so tonight, and every time we bless the bread and the cup in remembrance of him, we rejoice that in his fellowship all our divisions are overcome, and we hear his call, 'Follow me.'



OBEDIENCE

Read: Isaiah 50.4–9a / Mark 14.26–52

TONIGHT we are with Jesus in Gethsemane as he faces the full horror of the fate that awaits him. It takes me back to the first time I visited the Holy Land in 1988, and our visit one evening to the Church of All Nations next to the Garden of Gethsemane. It is built around a large rock, believed to be the place where Jesus prayed in anguish on the night he was betrayed. As I sat around it, the reality of what Jesus endured this for me hit me in a way that it had not done before. And my tears flowed.

Isaiah says of the Servant, ‘The Lord has given me the tongue of a teacher,’ and that is very true of Jesus. The crowds were astounded at the authority with which he taught, but did they also learn from his example? Jesus taught as much, if not more, through what he did than through what he said, and we see that in Gethsemane.

As they arrived Jesus said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray’, and then to his closest companions, Peter, James and John, he expressed the full extent of his feelings, ‘My heart is ready to break with grief; stop here, and stay awake.’ Mark says, ‘Horror and anguish overwhelmed him.’ We need to let the full weight of Mark’s words speak to us: Jesus was not one to be overwhelmed. He has controlled events; but now things are different. The full reality of what he must endure comes upon him, even to the extent that he prays that there might be another way. We see here the cost of reconciliation: the Son of God pleading with God. Throwing himself on the ground, the One to whom obedience came naturally, asked to be spared, but even so, willing to obey: ‘Yet not my will but yours,’ he says.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul says Jesus was ‘obedient unto death, even death on a cross!’ (*Philippians* 2.8) Seeking the will of God and being obedient to it was meat and drink to Jesus. We are told he would spend time alone in prayer, listening to God, aligning himself with God’s will, just like Isaiah’s servant who said, ‘The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards.’ Nor did Jesus. On one of his journeys a woman in the crowd cried out, ‘Happy the womb that carried you’; he replied: ‘No, happy are those who hear the word of God and keep it.’ (*Luke* 11.27–28)

Jesus’ example of obedience is profoundly counter-cultural in a world where doing your own thing, adopting a chosen life-style, and measuring personal worth by material criteria are widely accepted norms. There is also the sense that ‘I have no need to change. I am as I am. These are the impulses and desires that I have, and therefore they must be fulfilled.’ Rowan Williams describes this as a crude claim of right to an unexamined, instinctual life, in which we are spared the burden of choice, and it is widespread. Some years ago, Frank Sinatra’s song *My Way* was popular at funerals. It is the anthem of those who seek to live by their own lights. It is illustrated in *Habits of the Heart*, a study of individualism and commitment in American life. The authors take Margaret, a therapist, as one of their representative Americans. Margaret accepts the world as it is, and operates on the assumption ‘that what I want to do and what I feel like is what I should do.’ As she put it, ‘What I think the universe wants from me is to take my values, whatever they might happen to be, and to live up to them as much as I can.’ Margaret’s vision is for each person to be self-reliant, but in a way that leaves little room for interdependence or relating the purpose of life to higher goals.

In Margaret’s world the self is sovereign, the sole source of authority. Self-centered attitudes lead to conflict. We see it in anti-social behaviour; we see it in the way the rich and multi-national corporations avoid paying their fair share of tax; we see it tragically in the way many men walk away from family responsibilities because

life has not worked out as they wanted – like the father I heard about the other day who rejected his Down’s syndrome baby because it wasn’t the child of his dreams. He simply walked out, deserting his wife and child. It’s a disturbing example of how the economic imperative of acting rationally to maximise our own interests shapes our lives, whether at work or in the home. Yesterday I spoke of a different economic imperative, shalom, which is about taking everybody’s interests seriously. Shalom acknowledges that we depend on each other; it requires obedience to a calling higher than serving our own interests. In other words, shalom requires us to accept a source of authority *outside* the self, and to heed voices other than our own, above all the voice of God.

This is what Jesus teaches us as he prays in anguish against the rock. He accepted a source of authority beyond his own desires, a source of authority that took root in his heart and shaped his life. In a world bent on doing its own thing, he shows another way, a way that is truly life-giving. Surely, we know in our hearts that self-centredness is not the way to peace nor to personal maturity. The way of Jesus frees us from self-concern and leads us to new life and hope for ourselves and for others, just as Jesus’ obedience brought new life and hope to the world. He calls to us, ‘Follow me.’



MAUNDY THURSDAY

HUMILITY

Read: Isaiah 11.1–10 / John 13.1–17

JOHN'S account of the Last Supper differs from that of Mark; he records the washing of the disciples' feet, not the blessing of the bread and wine. The context was a dispute among the disciples about precedence. Luke says that a jealous dispute broke out: who among them should rank highest? In response Jesus rebuked them, reminding them that the ways of the world were not the ways of the Kingdom. He came among them to serve, and not to 'lord it' over them. (*Luke 22.24–25*) As Jesus knelt before his disciples, he matched his words with his deeds.

The washing of feet, a menial task performed by a servant for the guests as they arrived for supper, is a lesson in humility. The word comes from the Latin *humus*, earth. To be humble is to be earthed; to be in touch with what is true. Humbling himself, taking the form of a slave (*cf. Philippians 2.7*), Jesus showed what true leadership is like – indeed he showed what true divinity is like. 'How does he do this?' asked William Temple. 'Does he order a throne to be placed that he may receive the homage of his subjects? No, he rises from table, lays aside his garments, takes a towel, ties it round him, pours water into a basin, and begins to wash his disciples' feet, and to dry them with the towel.' This is God the servant of whom Isaiah spoke. He said to those he had washed, 'You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Then if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example: you are to do as I have done for you.' As Archbishop Justin Welby has said, 'When the one to whom all power was given knelt down to wash feet, God reversed the world order.' (*Dethroning Mammon*, p. 90.)

If we hope for justice, for everybody's interests to be taken seriously, we need to follow Jesus' example of servant leadership. He may have been addressing the disciples, but I doubt if his understanding of leadership was meant to be confined to them. Jesus did not divide life into neat compartments, sacred and secular, public and private. His example sets the pattern for all leadership, whether in the holy place or in the market place; so, what would servant leadership look like in the secular world? One model is that of Saint Benedict in his *Rule for Monasteries*. He does not set out a developed theory, but in describing the way the abbot and other senior figures of the monastery should conduct themselves, he enunciates an approach that can be extended to any organisation where people strive together to achieve a common goal, living and acting by common values, and this should include all public institutions and commercial enterprises. The servant leader has three basic tasks: first, to be accountable, both to a higher authority beyond the self and to those he leads; second, to be concerned for the whole person, that is for the personal and moral growth of all personnel, not just for their technical competence; and third, to create a community, a group bound together by common values and aims, not merely by material goals and the protection of common interests.

This model of leadership is very different to that prevailing in the world in which Jesus lived, and no less in the modern world. It challenges all understandings of leadership based on status or power or personality. Jesus said: 'I am among you as one who serves.' (*Luke* 22.27) This is the sign of good leadership, whether in the world, government, business or the Church, but it is in short supply and most of today's problems can be traced to bad or inadequate leadership. All too often those who lead us turn out to be either self-serving with little concern for justice, accountable (if at all) solely to their supporters, or so concerned to retain popularity that justice is sacrificed to expediency. We hope and long for better, and Jesus points the way.

At Christmas we hear Isaiah's prophecy of new leader, on whom the spirit of the LORD will rest, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and power, of knowledge and worship. He will judge the poor with justice, ushering in a world reconciled, where natural enmities are overcome: the wolf living with the lamb; the leopard lying down with the kid; the calf and the young lion feeding together. This leader, says Isaiah, will be God's sign to the nations (*Isaiah 11.10*).

On Maundy Thursday we see that sign to the nations, the One on whom the spirit of the LORD rests, kneel before his disciples and perform for them an intimate task of service. It is too much for Peter, who protests: 'I will never let you wash my feet.' Maybe, like many people today, he wanted a strong leader, one who takes all the decisions, with the rest of us simply following behind. That's not the way of Jesus; he was a strong leader, but his strength was the strength of humility, not power, and it is only in the strength of humility that we will establish justice and peace in the world. Jesus says to Peter: 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.' In effect Jesus says, 'If you want to continue my work you must let me come close to you, as you must come close to the world.' He says the same to us: 'Follow me.'



GOOD FRIDAY

SELF-GIVING

Read: Isaiah 52.13 – 53.12 / Mark 15

‘THEN they led him out to crucify him.’ The way to Golgotha led across the city from the Praetorium through a warren of narrow, winding alleys. The prisoner is close enough to the bystanders for them to strike him, trip him up, spit upon him. When Jesus requires help they pick another victim, Simon of Cyrene, someone from another country, not from the city like themselves, a stranger they could kick around. The abuse continues after Jesus has been nailed to the cross. The people jeer at him: ‘He saved others but he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross. If we see that, we shall believe.’ Mark says the priests and the scribes joined in, jesting with one another. This is about as low as you can get: laughing as your victim suffers.

Darkness comes over the land, and in the darkness Jesus utters in anguish the one cry recorded by Mark, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ His life ends with a question. In this cry there is a terrifying aloneness; Jesus no longer feels that close communion with the Father that he has had throughout his life. Bearing the weight of the sin of the world he experiences the alienation of the world from God. The Son of God feels forsaken by God. The cup is not taken away.

Jesus, we say, was obedient unto death, even death on a cross (*Philippians 2.8*). The words fall easily from our lips. Mark shows us what they really mean. And it is a severe test of faith. Can we believe in a God who does not save by miracles, and who provides no proof that the Good News is true? A God who does not intervene, and

alleviate suffering? If we see God standing by while his Son suffers excruciating pain and mental torment, requiring this as some sort of price or satisfaction for his outrage at the sinfulness of the world, then I don't think we can believe in him. Such a God is a monster. But if we see God himself in Jesus bearing the pain and the grief of the sin of the world, then we can believe in him, because we know from our own experience that reconciliation requires self-giving.

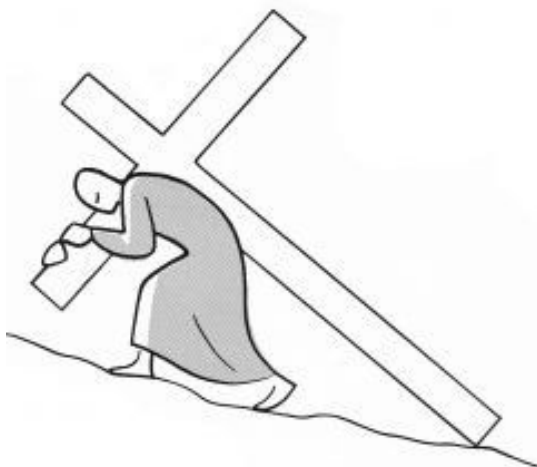
When we are divided against one another, whether individuals, groups, or nations, reconciliation requires a peace-maker. We appoint people specially to undertake this work, for example: diplomats, industrial conciliators and marriage counsellors. This work is lonely, isolating, painful and costly. The peace-maker has to give of him- or herself in building the bridge of reconciliation. Peace-making involves self-sacrifice, putting yourself on the line, accepting that you will be hurt as you bear the anger, the hurt, the lack of trust; but it is that self-giving that draws out the poison, creating an opportunity for a new beginning. If this is true of the sons of men, how much more is it true of self-giving of the Son of Man?

In a remarkably prescient prophecy, Isaiah teaches that this is the way of God. The Servant despised and rejected, from whom others turned away, 'bore our infirmities and carried our diseases... He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his wounds we are healed.' Jesus is the suffering servant who built the bridge of reconciliation between God and his creation that no one else could build. Jesus' death meant life for Barabbas, and 'Barabbas' means 'Everyman'. 'Through him,' wrote St Paul, 'God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace though the shedding of his blood on the cross.' (*Colossians 1.20*)

The way of devotion, fellowship, obedience and humility is the way of self-giving. Jesus said, 'Anyone who wants to be a follower of mine must renounce self; he must take up his cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life

for my sake and for the gospel's will save it.' This is a huge challenge, particularly in our culture which encourages us to do our own thing, single-mindedly pursuing our self-interest, where status and success come through acquisition and consumption, and where the good news is to be up with the latest fashion, or the success of one's team in sport. But, as we have seen in the pandemic, when we are really in need, the only way is self-giving, not self-satisfaction. And our world of conflict is deeply in need; the way of Jesus is the way of hope.

As Jesus died Mark says he gave a loud cry, 'and the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.' The curtain separated the sanctuary from the rest of the temple, protecting it from view, and, symbolically, protecting God from view. Only the priests were permitted to go beyond it. Jesus' death rends the curtain and removes the barrier. From now on all can see God at work, as those who behold the Cross see him at work, and through this death on the Cross that we celebrate and proclaim, everyone may now approach him. There may have been darkness over the land, but in that darkness God was at work. Jesus is the light shining in that darkness; he calls to us, 'Follow me.'



EASTER EVE

LOVE

Read: Isaiah 12 / Mark 16.1–8a

MARK ends his Gospel on a dramatic note. It seems unfinished, and there was a time when it was believed that the original ending had been lost, but today the general view is that Mark did end his story with the women overwhelmed by what they had seen and heard. The other ‘endings’ have been added by later hands. Mark’s abrupt ending is consistent with the whole tenor of his Gospel. Time and again he tells us how the people were astonished and set at naught by the divine power and teaching of Jesus, and now, at the end, the women are completely overwhelmed by their experience.

They had gone early to the tomb to anoint Jesus, a final act of love for the one who had loved them and taught them, and who had brought God alive for them unlike any other teacher. It had not been possible to anoint him when he died, or on the next day because it was the Sabbath, and so, on the third day they came at the earliest opportunity to make good the omission, wondering who would roll away the stone. They must have panicked, fear rising within them, when they saw that the stone had been moved, and it must have taken some courage to enter the tomb, fearing what they might find: had the body been stolen, or worse, desecrated? But instead of a body they see sitting there ‘a young man wearing a white robe’, who speaks to them. Angels were believed to represent the presence of God; no wonder they are dumbfounded by the experience; no wonder they ‘ran away from the tomb, trembling with amazement.’ Clearly they were not expecting the resurrection. Jesus had spoken about it, but they had not really taken in what he was saying, after all the idea of

resurrection, let alone the reality, is beyond the limits of our experience. No wonder they ran away, afraid to speak.

‘He has been raised’, the Church proclaims. The resurrection is an act of God, not something Jesus did for himself. He was not restored to this life, like Lazarus, but to a new order of existence entirely, beyond the limitations of time and space. It is both continuous with this life, and utterly different to it. Jesus is recognisably the same person, but no longer tied to the earth. How do we understand it? What sense do we make of it? It’s not surprising that many people find it hard to believe. Yet it happened. The clearest sign of this is the change in the disciples: from being in fear of their lives, hiding behind locked doors, they are out on the street proclaiming the Good News. They defy the Chief Priests and elders to their faces, and are even willing to accept humiliation and punishment at their hands for the sake of the truth. It is the most astonishing turn-around, and it needs some explaining. The only thing that can explain it is a life-changing experience, and that was seeing Jesus alive, sharing food with them as he had always done, and receiving from him the gift of a new spirit. Their experience of the risen Jesus gave them power to continue his work. In God’s love nothing is lost, all is gathered and raised to new life.

Isaiah had foreseen this. On the day of the Lord, he said, ‘you will say: “God is my deliverer. I am confident and unafraid, for the Lord is my refuge and defence and has shown himself my deliverer.” With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation ... for the Holy One of Israel is among you in majesty.’ The risen Jesus is the Christ, the anointed One, who reveals the majesty and the grace of God.

At Easter we celebrate not simply an event, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, but more profoundly the meaning of that event. His resurrection is the sign in time of the eternal truth that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (*cf.* 2 *Corinthians* 5.19). We too can draw water from the wells of salvation. The authority with which Jesus taught, his claim to forgive sins, his outreach to sinners and

those on the edge of society, his relationship of a son to the Father – all this is revealed to be grounded in God himself. The resurrection does not make these things true; they were always true. The resurrection is the clearest demonstration of their truth, the most profound assurance of what God is like. (cf. Richard Harries, *Being A Christian*, p.23).

At Easter we celebrate that God in Jesus takes away the sins of the world, but we also celebrate that in Jesus God shows us how to live in the world in justice and peace. As we have seen, the Way of Jesus is the way of hope for a world in conflict. The way of Jesus is the way to a new life in which sin is overcome and everybody's interests are taken seriously. The resurrection shows that this is the Way of Jesus is the Way of God, the only way to justice and peace that has eternal validity. Jesus saves us by bearing our sins; he saves us also by showing us how to live.

The risen Christ calls to a world in conflict, 'Follow me!'



Meditations for
Advent, Lent and Holy Week
by Peter Sills

— ADVENT —

The Closeness of God's Coming
Jesus is Lord
All My Hope

— LENT & HOLY WEEK —

The Life Hidden with Christ in God
The Time Has Come
According to John
Do Not Weep for Me

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