



ral this morning.

Left to ourselves, we define ourselves against others. We unite ourselves by finding an enemy. We reassure ourselves with a pride that demeans others.

Such are the age-old ways of gaining and guarding power. They treat proper difference and diversity, such as we are seeing with our hard pressed and unjustly vilified political leaders, as threats. They use words like treason or naivety.

Fear led the rulers who took Jesus as their greatest threat to seek, successfully, to terrify Pilate into the unjust execution of Jesus, and then to attack the new Christian church in Jerusalem.

Hate paved the road for Hitler to attack the Jews of Europe. Every event, such as the fire at Notre Dame, is used by someone to stir hatred with lies, last week, by certain conspiracy groups, lies against Muslims, who have suffered so much in New Zealand.

Pride denies our need of God and says we are sufficient to ourselves, that the will to power is indeed our vocation.

The will to power leads to the murder of innocents in Sri Lanka, the utterly despicable destruction that, on this holiest of days, seeks to challenge the reality of the risen Christ, to say that darkness will conquer, that our choice is surrender or death.

Jesus chose to defy this darkness and he is risen indeed, so that death and evil know that their end is marked, promised and assured. Yet still evil rises in these times between the resurrection and the judgement, exercising the will to power, the seeking of an enemy.

Such was the prophecy of Jesus when he said to his disciples that as he suffered they would suffer, but that he has overcome.

This morning, about an hour ago, I spoke to the Bishop of Colombo, Bishop Dhiloraj. All the churches attacked earlier this morning were Roman Catholic; on your behalf I have sent our condolences to the Archbishop in Colombo and told him we are praying for him.

Bishop Dhiloraj had been in the midst of his Easter Eucharist; he was just beginning the Prayer of Consecration when the police arrived and said, "You must come with us, they are about to come and kill you."

He refused to move until he had finished the Prayer of Consecration in his packed cathedral, and I quote his exact words to me: "If God gives me permission to live, I shall live. If he gives me permission to die, I shall die."

Such was the prophecy of Jesus, that he has overcome.

And today, we say the Easter acclamation, Christ is risen, with bittersweet joy, knowing that our sisters and brothers, and many others of other faiths, suffer and mourn.

Yet we still sing our alleluias, still we follow the command of Christ and respond with justice - but in love, not revenge and bitterness, here and around the world.

We mourn and condole, we weep with those who have lost all as the Church has done from time immemorial, for indeed, despite all, Christ is risen!

Such is our joy, and such is human sin, the sin laid on Jesus that was so overwhelming that for a few hours, day was turned to night.

Then the resurrection of Jesus in the early dawn, restored the light.

And in that early dawn an empty tomb was found, and as the sun rose the astonished disciples found that the world had shifted from being defined by hatred, fear, resentment and division – because Jesus is alive, his bodily resurrection casts a light not only for Christians but for the whole world, a light to which we must all witness as Bishop Dhiloraj did this morning.

In the 1970s, climbing Mt Kenya, we arrived at the walkable summit as dawn was rising. 210 miles to the south east we could just see the first splash of sun on another summit, Kilimanjaro. The prophet Isaiah, writing to an exiled people, shows them the sunlight which only the prophet sees, so great is the distance. He gazed on a future, which we heard read, of a stable country of purposeful work, assurance of life, strength of community, and the eternal presence of the living God.

Yet left to our own words, our own vision, our own devices, we have failing sight and diminishing hope.

Resurrection sheds an unfading light because the tomb is empty, Jesus is alive. We need such light today, not only in this country but wherever materialism, inequality, war, tyranny or cruelty have taken hold and enslave the human spirit.

Peter the Jew speaks of Jesus whom he had seen risen, to Cornelius the gentile, in our reading from Acts – of Jesus the man, of the cross and of the resurrection – and as he speaks, the light falls on Cornelius and his household and they see; and the church becomes global and universal.

We will see the result again next year at the Lambeth Conference. People of every culture and language will gather. Hundreds of women will come from the poorest and hardest areas of the world, Bishop's wives: they will be typically Anglican – in that the typical Anglican today is a woman in her 30s in sub-Saharan Africa, probably on less than \$4 a day, probably persecuted or in an area of conflict.

And that very diversity, of which we will rejoice and celebrate, is the descendant of Peter's actions and still the Church witnesses to seeing the resurrected Jesus through its life today: Jean Vanier, recently taken into palliative care, is the founder of the L'Arche communities.

They are places where those with intense learning difficulties live alongside those without. His life with Jesus is different, in quality and in depth, more real, more earthed.

It is seen amidst the demands of community, and in the 60 years since he started the first L'Arche community, he has changed our approach to disability. Not only the Church but far beyond.

Such life witnesses as remarkably as that of Peter. The Kingdom of God is seen in the local and the global; with the obscure and with the well-known.

Ten days ago, there was a gathering of political and Church leaders from the South Sudan, at the Vatican. The politicians who came have been in charge during the civil war during which 400,000 have died and 2,500,000 are refugees.

For possibly the first time since the Reformation there was a joint effort towards peace by a former moderator of the Church of Scotland, an Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope Francis. That by itself was a miracle.

Propelled at the end of our day of retreat by the Pope kneeling and kissing their feet to implore peace, the politicians committed to work together – another miracle.

I heard this morning that in his Easter message President Salva Kiir spoke at length of this retreat and its impact on him.

There is a million miles to go, but a log jam has, for the moment, been broken.

The Church witnesses through its response to disaster and setback. Notre Dame will rise from the ashes, as did Rheims, as did Coventry, and the Cathedral ruined and rebuilt will testify ever more clearly to seeing the resurrected Jesus.

Such is the potential of witness, of making seen in the present the picture that Isaiah painted which became achievable through the resurrection. In our country we will see our future through forgiveness, reconciliation, hope and overcoming these stories of fear and betrayal.

But Christians must show how to live resurrection life; that the rest of the world may see above all in forgiving one another and loving one another, making visible what is unseen; but witness begins with the individual meeting the risen Christ.

Mary Magdalene was apparently unimportant – a woman at a time when women did not count.

Yet God does not see her that way for she is the first to see Jesus after the men have gone away, puzzled. Jesus commissions her as apostle to the apostles, and in her seeing, we have the model testimony for all of us. It is humble, truthful and simple: “I have seen the Lord.”

Witness comes from each of us speaking of what we know and see – why faith matters – by speaking with the utmost simplicity.

She does not explain the resurrection – she says only: “I have seen the Lord.”

But only the witness of a changed person can point to resurrection, so all may see. Only a vision of justice and hope can be adequate to the resurrection. It is the love of Christ risen and encountered today, as then, that can so fill us with love that it flows, as does that of Jean Vanier, into our world and nation, bringing forgiveness and the new start we so need.

Mary Magdalen saw the risen Jesus. Peter testified to what he had seen, and others saw the risen Christ.

Isaiah saw the vision of the future the risen Jesus brings, the church lives with the risen Christ that it sees, lit by His love and hope, enabling the world and our country in this time of division, to see forgiveness, unity, stability, generosity and gift as its future.

7 min read

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