



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF CANTERBURY



his morning.

In this Cathedral I often gaze at the stones. They have seen everything; from the cries of the monks around Thomas down in the crypt, to the howl of the sirens in the blitz. So many people have come and gone, so much change has occurred, yet the stones do not move. That is the nature of great stones, they mark a finality, an established place. They say to us "you may change, live, die, but we are stone, once put in place we do not move. We watch." Stones have spoken silently for millennia, from Stonehenge to the 10 Commandments, but they are not witnesses, but mysteries - or rules.

And that was the nature of the stone in front of the tomb of Jesus. It should not move, it should, forever, testify that here was the body of Jesus of Nazareth, a failed rebel. But the women go to the tomb and find the stone **has** moved. It did not stand forever observing events without and decay within. We might think "If only it could have spoken of what it saw! Just a stone, unable to speak, to observe or to act."

Here is the greatest stone sign in the whole of history. Yet it still needed a witness who spoke, a human being.

The women go very early and find the tomb empty, the stone moved. The disciples rush around at various speeds, and then: "Then the disciples returned to their homes." In other words, they do nothing.

But one of these women stands and weeps. Faithful to the memory of Jesus, she will not run away. She meets him, astonished - yes, but also full of belief. That is one of the key themes of John's gospel, believing, and she believes. And she witnesses.

What the stone at the tomb saw, and these stones around us today have heard, is that Jesus has risen from the dead. He has moved the greatest stone that exists for every one of us, the stone of death that tells us we have only a dark future without existence. The stone has moved and the light of life floods into our lives, our churches, the joy of Christ is among us and in us, the certainty of life forever is offered to all who say 'yes': because Jesus is risen.

In every town and village in this country, in almost every country round the world churches stand as mute confession of the resurrection. They stand, but like the stone at the tomb they cannot speak. Only witnesses can speak, and in God's values no witness more or less important than any other. Mary Magdalene became a witness of what she had experienced: "I have seen the Lord".

Cathedrals and churches make great statements, but without words. Witnesses are those people who know Christ; lay or ordained, old or young, gender, politics, sexuality or whatever irrelevant - all are equally witnesses. The resurrection happened, and it changes our view of the universe. Once we have seen the reality of the risen Jesus nothing else should be seen in the same way as before.

To witness is to be a martyr. I am told by the Coptic Bishop in England that the Coptic Christians murdered in Libya last month died proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord. They are martyrs, a word that means both one that dies for their faith and one that witnesses to faith. There have been

so many martyrs in the last year. On Maundy Thursday, three days ago around 150 Kenyans were killed because of being Christian. They are witnesses, unwilling, unjustly, wickedly, and they are martyrs in both senses of the word.

Christians must resist without violence the persecution they suffer and support persecuted communities, with love and goodness and generosity.

Yet these martyrs too are caught up in the resurrection: their cruel deaths, the brutality of their persecution, their persecution is overcome by Christ himself at their side because they share his suffering, at their side because he rose from the dead. Because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead the cruel are overcome, evil is defeated, martyrs conquer.

And all these martyrs in their testimony to the resurrection point at us and ask, "in your comfort, in your great buildings which call out soundlessly to the reality of the risen Jesus, in your well organised societies, you who have lived these many decades under governments that welcome opposition, and that are led by those who seek honourably and honestly to serve the people, are you **still** witnesses?"

Today are we **still** witnesses that say, "Jesus is alive"? St Peter says we are living stones: the church is a gathering of martyrs, of witnesses to the love and goodness of Jesus. Every action we take, every inaction, every agreement, every disagreement in which love is maintained, everything we do and say, or refrain from doing or saying, everything witnesses. As living stones we support each other to be witnesses, as do the stones of this Cathedral.

The building around us, itself a gift of God, burns with the glory of God when **we** burn with the fire of His love and cry out in witness: RS Thomas writes of an abandoned chapel:

But here once on an evening like this,

in the darkness that was about

his hearers, a preacher caught fire

and burned steadily before them

with a strange light, so that they saw

the splendour of the barren mountains

about them and sang their amens

fiercely, narrow but saved

in a way that men are not now

The stone at the tomb was a silent witness; we are living stones, speaking witnesses: let us be clear, gentle, loving, peaceful - yet bold, fiery witnesses who in a dark world sing our song of light: "The Lord is risen, Jesus is alive, all creation is transformed."

5 min read

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