



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

The Archbishop gave the sermon at the Eucharist for Easter Day at York Minster. [This service is livestreamed.](#)

Dancing the night away

Just after Jesus utters his cry of terrifying abandonment from the cross, and just before the centurion declares that Jesus is Son of God, St Mark's Gospel tells us that the curtain in the Temple was split from top to bottom.

This is the curtain that separated the holiest place in the temple in Jerusalem from everything else, the place where the high priest would go each year on the Day of Atonement. What this means is that all the barriers between God and the world are broken down through Jesus' death on the cross.

In fact, the tearing of the curtain in the Temple shows that we don't need temples anymore. In Christ, we have direct access to God. His new light is shining.

I became the 98th Archbishop of York in July 2020, during the first lockdown. Two years on, we are learning to live with COVID-19, but it has not gone away. Across the world, millions of people have suffered. We are all much more aware of our frailty and mortality.

We have also learned how to live differently. Often, more simply. And to keep on doing this is the biggest challenge facing our world as the climate crisis bites. But, as ever, the poorest communities in our own nation and across the world have suffered the most. Vaccines are available for the wealthy, but not so much for the poor.

Then in Europe, where most of us have enjoyed almost unbroken peace for the whole of our lives, where we saw the Cold War thaw and truly believed that peace was the new normal, Russia's terrible invasion of Ukraine shattered our illusions, reminding us, I hope and pray, that peace cannot be taken for granted.

But on this Easter morning, the message of Easter remains the same. Stones are rolled away. Barriers of separation are dismantled. We now have access to God through the dying and rising of Jesus Christ.

We belong to one another. We are children of God. That is what the death and resurrection of Jesus achieves. We are one humanity inhabiting one world. In this way, and in this way only, will we find peace.

When I left the diocese of Chelmsford, I was given a picture of the crucifixion by the Scottish painter, Craigie Aitchison. (put Craigie Aitchison crucifixion in your search engine)

In the picture, a desolate and abandoned Christ is alone on the cross. There is virtually nothing else in the painting. The cross stands in an empty, though vivid and brightly coloured landscape.

These past two years, I've spent a long time looking at it, it hangs in my study at Bishopthorpe. It is contemplative - just Christ upon the cross, the cross fixed into the landscape of the world; and disturbing - it shows the utter loneliness of the cross.

And even though it depicts a forlorn and forsaken Christ, it is still Christ. He is still present. His love and his vision for the world persists, even when things are dark and difficult, especially when things are dark and difficult.

Therefore, when we find ourselves saying – as of course we do - where is God when this terrible tragedy happens, when a child dies, when an atrocity takes place, when Ukraine is invaded, when a virus attacks, when a little boat of refugees sinks in the channel, we must look to the cross. There is Christ sharing in the sorrows of the world. And to the resurrection, to stones rolled away, barriers broken down. There is Christ raising up what was fallen, binding us together, showing us the way of peace.

And in many ways, in the past couple of years, we have all felt forsaken. The things we took for granted and the things we relied on were taken away. They had to be. It was the way we protected and defended each other. But it was hard.

For Christian people, it also meant not being able to go to church, and therefore not receiving the sacraments that are the heartbeat and – quite literally – the lifeblood of our Christian life.

In this exile for the past two years and in this fast, everything that challenges our world and everything that we depended on to sustain our Christian life was suspended, but Christ remained. His love endured.

There we were, on our own, cut off in the upper rooms of our homes and unable to go to church, and Christ found us.

I see this in Craigie Aitchison's images of the isolated Christ, who comes to us in our isolation, showing us that we don't actually need anything else, and that in the end all the things we enjoy - material blessings, other people, the worship and comfort of the church, the sacraments themselves - all of them will cease.

Or to put it another way; He is Risen. This is the great Easter hope. In his dying and rising, we find our identity as those who are redeemed and restored by Christ. We find ourselves within the life of the God who now bears the scars of passion.

Or rather, Christ finds us. He comes to us, as he came to Mary Magdalene, and he asks why we're crying and who we're looking for.

He has returned to take us with him. Like Mary and like Elizabeth who will be baptised in just a moment, He knows us by name. He shows us what really matters. He shows us what we should strive for, which is why, among so many other things that trouble our world at the moment, it is so depressing and so distressing this week to find that asylum seekers fleeing war, famine and oppression from deeply troubled parts of the world will not be treated with the dignity and compassion that is the right of every human being, and instead of being dealt with quickly and efficiently

here on our soil, will be shipped to Rwanda.

We can do better than this. We can do better than this because of what we see in the Risen Christ a vision for our humanity, which breaks barriers down - not new obstacles put in the path. After all, there is, in law, no such thing as an illegal asylum seeker. It is the people who exploit them that we need to crack down on, not our sisters and brothers in their need.

We don't need to build more barriers and cower in the darkness of the shadows they create. In Christ new light has dawned upon the world. Therefore, we know that evil, violence, prejudice, oppression, discrimination do not have the last word. Because Christ is Risen.

More than ever, as we emerge from Covid, the great question I find myself asking, is the same as the one asked by my predecessor, William Temple at the height of the second world war: 'When this is done, what sort of nation do we want to be?'

So this is my question this Easter day: Do I want to be part of a nation that is hopeful, enterprising, that cares for those in need; that supports those who are in poverty because they can't afford the heating, or food for the table and offers them genuine help?

Do we want to be a nation that seeks to build and make peace, not merely enjoy it; that builds an international consensus about what it means to live alongside our neighbour?

Do we want to continue to be known as a country that opens proper legitimate pathways for all who flee violence, conflict and oppression – not just those from Ukraine, but also those fleeing other conflicts and the effect of climate change?

Do we want to be known for the robustness of our democracy where those in public life live to the highest standards and where we can trust those who lead us to behave with integrity and honour?

The question of who is my neighbour, the question of how we live together, of what kind of country are we, the question of how I live my life with integrity, is all answered by the mystery of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

On the cross, Jesus cried out in desperate loneliness, feeling utterly forsaken by God. And we know that this howl of anguish, which resonates with the cry of our hearts, was not the end, but the means by which the end was turned to a beginning. His joy, and the joy of the resurrection drive away the darkness.

This is what the Easter faith is all about. This is why we are gathered in York Minster today. New beginnings. New hope. A new way of living. A new way of inhabiting the earth. Sorrow turned to dancing. Therefore, even in the midst of great sorrow and great challenge, like the sorrows and challenges of our world today, we, the Easter people, respond like this: with hopefulness, with compassion, with a new vision for the world. We break out the champagne; we send out for curry; we dress up to the nines; we put flowers in our hair (if we've got any that is); we eat chocolate

and oysters and dance the night away.

Ah, that is what Jesus did when he rose from the dead. He danced the night away. We must do this too.

Happy Easter. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.



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