

'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved... I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.'¹

Having just come through Holy Week and Easter we are all intimately aware that Christ, through His resurrection leads us to eternal life. He banishes the fear of death for us and brings us new hope. A living hope that this world is not all there is. A certainty that so long as we focus on the right things this stepping stone will melt away into a glorious world of contentment and peace. A place where warm radiant light enriches all that we are and where the worries and quarrels of today are of no consequence. Heaven will heal us from all our annoyances and give us life so abundant that we will not be able to resist joining in the chorus of praise and joviality at God's eternal banquet. All of us sharing the bread of heaven.

We are an Easter people and alleluia is our song!

But it was not always this way. It is only the all submissive death of Christ and his later resurrection and ascension that gives us this assurance. As the first letter of Peter reminds us, 'when he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.'²

It is the paradoxical mix of His humiliating death with His unshakable love and faithfulness that provide the backdrop for His victory and our redemption, because through them He is able to consume our inability to reach the mark. As Charles Gore, that great Victorian bishop of Worcester and Birmingham pondered; through His self-sacrificial death 'he took upon Himself all that tells against divine love, all that has ever wrung from men's hearts the bitter words of unbelief'.³ And we are all guilty from time to time of hammering in a nail or two to the broken body of our Lord. We deny his existence when following becomes too hard. We blame him for things that are of our own making. We place our Christian credentials to the side for a few hours while we treat someone else with disdain or mistrust. We take things of God and hide them in a closet for our own self-gratification – stopping others from seeing in in the process.

But Christ's faithfulness, humility, love, even at the point of death over comes all of this so long as we let Him heal us. And so the bitter taste of death, decay and failure is transformed into the voluptuous banquet of resurrection, and with it fresh hope for humanity once lost. Christ's resurrection allows us to change. It allows us to be free from the shackles of distrust, meanness, unkindness and gives us a chance to live by generosity, kindness and love. These are the signs of the kingdom and we are

¹ John 10:9

² 1 Peter 2:23-24

³ Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God; being the Brampton Lectures for the Year 1891* (London: John Murray, 1891 -2012), p.120

called to be a kingdom people. Expressing the radiance and light of our resurrected Lord through the way we behave and what we do.

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This is why we are working so hard at the moment to ensure that our church functions in a way that is open and transparent. Too often in institutions, up and down the country, committees and officers become so entrenched and committed to the tasks at hand, or keen to hold on to the power they feel they possess, that their activities begin to seem secretive and mysterious. Circles begin to be formed that others cannot penetrate. When people try, they are met with resistance and unkind defensiveness. It is no wonder that, all too easily, outsiders begin to view them with distrust and suspicion. It is not always easy to keep focusing in the right direction when there seem to be so many forces encouraging us to conduct ourselves in the wrong way; but such negativity is catching and spreads like a disease.

What we need to remember is, that these may seem like the ways of the world, but they are not attributes of God's kingdom and they are certainly not characteristics of Christ, whose body the church represents. The Church then has to conduct itself in an open, honest and transparent way, allowing as many people as possible to have a buy into what happens and why. It must radiate the glow of heavenly values; honesty, generosity, trust, giving others the benefit of the doubt, love. The more we do that as a church body, each individually contributing to the pot of blessings, the closer we move to that place of divine presence for which we all long: heaven.

What a marvellous inheritance we have been given. And we praise God that today more families have chosen to declare their faith in a God who gives us such wonderful blessings and commit to His church by having their children baptised at Geddington. It is so exciting for us to receive more youngsters into God's fold, because we all have a certainty that so long as we focus on the right things, and conduct ourselves in the right ways, we will begin to discover a glorious world of contentment and peace. A place where warm radiant light enriches all that we are and the worries and quarrels of today are of no consequence. Heaven will heal us from all our annoyances and give us life so abundant that we will not be able to resist joining in the chorus of praise and joviality at God's eternal banquet. All of us will share in the bread of heaven.

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