

# The Sunday after Easter

19<sup>th</sup> April 2020, 11am

*Christ Church New Southgate & Friern Barnet*

What do you do after Easter Sunday? What do you look forward to? Is it a bit of a let down after all the services leading up to the main event?

My son – who love a bargains heads straight to the Supermarkets who have Easter eggs on sale at a fraction of the original price (who else thinks that Easter egg chocolate tastes different!)

When we are in Church there is often a drop in the size of the congregation, and very often the Pastor takes a holiday...

I'm sure you will have a couple of your own!

Easter Sunday is a hard act to follow. The Sunday after Easter mood is about like the way you feel when you pull the car in the driveway at the end of a long holiday. Dinner is definitely a take-away occasion. The return to "normal" life is a bit sluggish.

Easter kind of wears us out. It's easy to understand. But it's also unfortunate. Because the other shoe has yet to drop. Easter is the beginning, not the conclusion. Just as our faith does not end with Good Friday crucifixion, neither does it end with Easter resurrection. We may be tired, but the New Testament story is not. Resurrection is certainly the pivotal moment in this drama; but there's another act to follow.

Easter does not exhaust the biblical narrative of God's saving work. There's more. What began with Adam and Eve, what began again with Noah and the ark, and again with Israel's escape from Egyptian bondage, and again with Jonah emerging from the whale's belly, and again with Israel's repeated returns from exile, and again with Mary's pregnancy—all these beginnings and new beginnings, now uniquely confirmed and summarized and restated in the resurrection, are the prelude to the final act in the story, one step short of the dramatic conclusion of the salvation story. There is another stage between the eruption of Easter and the inauguration of the New Heaven and the New Earth. Just as surely as Good Friday crucifixion is followed by and fulfilled in Easter resurrection, Easter in turn is followed by and blossoms into Pentecost.

Our New Testament text this morning is a bridge text between these two momentous occasions. Luke is at the end of his first book, about to start the second, which is the Acts of the Apostles. Here, in the final story of Luke's account, we find the resurrected Jesus appearing to the dazed and terrified disciples huddling behind closed doors in some secret location in Jerusalem. They've already found out about the empty tomb. The women have told them their fantastic tale of having spoken with Jesus, and while they're not dismissed out of hand as they were at first, the men probably still do not fully believe them.

Jesus suddenly appears among them. "Peace be to you," he says. He asks why they're still in hiding. "Why are you troubled?" as if he didn't know. And did you notice what came next? Before the disciples even have a chance to respond, Jesus asks if they have anything to eat.

*"bi Guys, whats up? What's for dinner?"* Seems like everywhere Jesus went in the Gospel stories, food gets passed around!

After repeating the same teaching he had given just a little earlier to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, about how God was fulfilling what was written in Hebrew Scripture, Jesus tells them they are as witnesses to this new reality—a reality not really new but only hidden and now revealed. "I am going to send you what my Father has promised" he says. And then a curious command: "but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." Don't rush out just yet, he says. Don't get ahead of yourselves. God will act again, to empower you. It is the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, which Luke would write about just a few chapters into his second book—the occasion of Pentecost.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. We're not yet to Pentecost. There's still a good bit to go of the 50 days separating Easter and Pentecost.

Right now we're in between times. Resurrection has occurred, but the reforming of the people of God has not yet happened. The coming of the Spirit's power is ahead of us still. Right now we're still waiting and listening and reading the signs of the times. And that brings me to the point of this message.

We are in the between times, between Easter and Pentecost, between the resurrection and the birth of the church.

But I also think we are between times now, in our lives. Between the normal and the new normal, between what we expected our lives to be and what they will become in the future. Whether we will ever go back to anything resembling our lives before Coronavirus.

Change is scary. But we have the opportunity now to be different. For a re-birth, for a society which values its essential workers. For a society which relies less on material things. For a society that appreciates nature, the seasons the bird song or spring flowers, for a society which knows where its food comes from and doesn't take it for granted. for a society which cares for the marginalised.

It is also a change for the church, We have been excluded from our buildings, so Church is exactly what it should be – a meeting of people. Physically distanced, (but not actually socially distanced) we are connecting in different ways. Through Zoom, skype, phone calls, texts, WhatsApp, or over the garden fence, chatting in queues, we have a unique opportunity to share our Christian selves, to be kind to neighbours, friends and strangers.

People are able to take in more than one church service – and able to access at any time. We can 'virtually' go to a different church, listen to the preacher, we know that people that would not necessarily come to the Church building on a Sunday morning are interested in faith, watching what we do.

We have also been given an opportunity to slow down. To rest in God, to pray more, to read the bible more, if we are not commuting, we have more time to do other things, and maybe some of those will bring us closer to God.

I recently had an opportunity to reflect, and make public some of my thoughts, at the time I wasn't sure whether to make them available to all... this is what I wrote:

*Although the news is terrifying at times, I do count myself as fortunate. I have a reasonably sized house for the three adults here to separate while working from home. we have a garden, and food, and we are settling into a rhythm of the new home-based lifestyle. My husband is still working, as is my son, but I had a lot of workshops booked for April, 3 more shows this year, all of which have been cancelled, along with a long-awaited trip to North Italy at the end of the month (our first holiday abroad in 8 years)*

*SO life has changed, but it still goes on. I have deep*

*admiration for all our essential workers, yes the NHS - I have at least one friend working on a Covid 19 ward, and well before the lockdown had been in contact with a Coronavirus patient. and others working in care homes and a mortuary. But also shelf stackers, police, waste collectors, delivery drivers, post office workers, people working for the utility companies, making sure that we have electricity, water and sewerage, and more, all of whom have contact with multiple households and are often on low wages. Teachers, many have been working hard to get systems in place for some teaching, but worksheets, craft ideas, and those who are still working - and through the holiday - for the children of essential workers.*

*I have a to do list as long as my arm, but am finding it really difficult to focus on things for any length of time. There seems to be pressure, from some quarters, to make sure that our houses are cleaner and tidier, that all the gardening will be done, that we will have learnt a new language, or skill. There are only a few that really have that privilege. I recently saw something online that scrubbed out all of the above and said*

***I have survived.*** *and that is the reality. There are people out there who are losing loved ones, who are grieving and not allowed to see their loved ones or attend a funeral.*

*I hope that after this all is finished, when we come outside our houses and resume our 'normal' lives that we will not take it for granted, that we will savour going to a friend's home for dinner, having a birthday party, visiting family, going to the pub for a stitch night, going to the theatre, or places of worship, or even using the equipment or playground in the park. Going to a cafe to sit and drink our coffee. going to a yarn show, going to a market. Hugs.*

*If you are feeling low, please know that you are not alone, some of the strongest are finding it difficult to cope, myself included. I did not expect to feel this way. but here we are.*

But after writing this and sending it out – I have had more responses about people feeling the same as I do than for anything else, I have written. There are times that I feel very low and for no discernible reason. That is when I reach out to God, at these times I will go for a walk, or sit in the garden and listen to Pray as you go, or some worship music.

I believe that God is with us, surrounding us, if we could only stop and reach out to him. I believe we are in a period of waiting, for a new unleashing of the Spirits power. That we have time to connect or re-connect with our God.