



*Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Can we really say that this this year, and if we can, what does it mean? I think we must say it, and not just because it's liturgically correct, but because it goes to the very essence of our faith. And this is an Easter faith, a faith centred on the resurrection; in which life triumphs over death, and hope over despair.

But I also remember a friend who had lost a parent during Lent saying to me that she couldn't celebrate Easter yet. Her mourning meant that Lent just continued, but she still recognised that Easter would come.

So I don't want to move to this too slickly or glibly. I'm not *feeling* particularly hopeful – that would seem to ignore or downplay the suffering of so many people, in illness, bereavement or economic hardship. That would seem not to appreciate the truly sacrificial work of NHS staff, carers and others; or to underestimate the sense of generalised anxiety and fear. The pan- in pandemic gives the universal sense of this.

But our faith is not just about our feelings – thank goodness or we would never make it to the altar. It is also about our disposition or how we look at the world; and that disposition, that interpretation, is to be hopeful, especially in circumstances like these.

Hopeful for what? Our reading of Scripture, our understanding of salvation history, is of a God who cares for and watches over his people even when they go astray. The rainbows which children have drawn and put up in their windows as a sign of solidarity with nurses, doctors and carers, is primarily God's sign of an everlasting covenant with all of us. And 'in these last days', as the Letter to the Hebrews phrases it, God became like us, in the person of Jesus the Messiah, who opened a new way, a new version of the covenant refocussed around unqualified love. The proof of this love, if you will, is that in the person of Jesus, God suffered and died.

The resurrection of Jesus is the triumph of God's solidarity with human beings in love. It is the hinge moment, when according to the poet Ursula Fanthorpe, *BC becomes AD*. 'In the year of our Lord' is equivalent to Emmanuel – 'God is with us'.

I remember once saying to a former Bishop of Plymouth, with some hesitation, that I still wanted to change the world. In a perhaps rare moment of theological insight, he replied rapidly and absolutely correctly, that in the resurrection, the world had already changed. Our task was to tell people and join in.

So in that sense I remain hopeful, and can encourage others to hold on to this resurrection hope, this Easter Day.

At some point in the future, when we can gather again, when we can hear again the stories told by Jesus and about Jesus, when we can share a handshake of peace with friend and stranger, when we can watch and see the miracle of the ordinary things of the earth turned into the mysteries of bread and wine, then we may *feel* Easter at last. Until then, we live in the moment of whatever that brings; we commit to God our sense of vulnerability or weakness, trusting to God who has the power of resurrection, for Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia!