EASTER SUNDAY CATHEDRAL

270316

Early - still dark – Mary Magdalene comes. Stone rolled away, tomb empty, linen wrappings lying. She goes to tell Simon Peter and the other disciple. They come running and look in. Simon Peter comes second in the race but is the first to go in. John doesn’t record his reaction – but the other disciple goes in – and ‘he saw and believed’. And Mary is weeping outside. She looks in and sees the angels. She turns around and sees what she thinks is the gardener. But when he speaks her name – as the good shepherd calls his sheep by name – she knows him. And she goes and tells the others – not that ‘he is risen’ but ‘I have seen the Lord’

One disciple sees and believes. One disciple doesn’t tell us what he thinks. One disciple believes when she hears him use her name. Resurrection is felt more than seen or apprehended

No doubt about Crucifixion. The sound of the nails going in reverberates in our souls. The false witnesses and the crowds howling for blood have their say. And then it is over, done, complete – and as Jesus himself says in the fullest sense ‘finished’

So what of the resurrection Gospel coming this year in early spring when the time change alters our perception of day and night? As I said on Good Friday morning here, I stood in a beautiful churchyard a couple of weeks ago on the south coast of Fife – beautiful place, spring flowers just beginning to come, a wisp of birdsong as we laid to rest a person of deep and resilient faith. Yes I can feel it in the depths of my soul. The trumpet will sound and there will be a full orchestra for the general resurrection on the last day. But resurrection faith for us is an almost inexpressibly delicate thing where grey light of dawn leaves us wondering and improbability moves into possibility and then into hope.

The deeply gloomy Welsh poet RS Thomas – who was an Anglican priest – wrote these lines in his poem ‘The Answer’

*… There have been times  
when, after long on my knees  
in a cold chancel, a stone has rolled  
from my mind, and I have looked  
in and seen the old questions lie   
folded and in a place   
by themselves, like the piled   
graveclothes of love’s risen body*

That is hard-won resurrection faith. It isn't an 'in your face' thing. He gets there - looks and sees the old questions lie like the folded grave clothes of love's risen body. But there is nothing simple or obvious about it.

Plenty of stones rolled up to the sepulchre of our hopes at present present. 31 deaths in Brussels, hundreds injured and countless people traumatised. It's religiously-motivated violence - the scourge of Ireland and the the worst of all because religion gives an ultimate and non-negotiable authority to a cause and the violence used to promote it. Refugees from five years of conflict in Syria - economic migrants from Africa weary of poverty, corruption and violence years for a better life as did the Scots and the Irish who built the New World and almost everywhere else - they struggle across Europe carrying their children seeking dignity and a new life. The folded grave clothes which RS Thomas saw are there in hidden acts of kindness, love and sacrifice - acts which give the lie to the inevitability of evil and death. And in our refusal to allow fear to overwhelm us. And in our determination not to succumb to the temptation to blame whole communities and to give way to Islamophobia

On this Easter morning, we are with those disciples who ran to the tomb when the women told them what they had found. One saw and believed. One didn't say. The third knew the reality of resurrection when Jesus called her by name. We find our resurrection faith in all kinds of ways. Sometimes as insistent faith. Sometimes in the graveyard in early spring. Sometimes in redemptive acts of kindness which negate hatred and death. Sometimes in those strange moments when what we were sure was a disaster turned out to have been refashioned into something new and better

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