EASTER DAY

ST PETERS 210419

‘Resurgam’ – the Latin word means ‘I shall rise again’

The story is that, in the debris of the former St Paul’s Cathedral in London after the Great Fire of 1666, they found a stone with Resurgam on it. Christopher Wren then built the stone into the fabric of the new Cathedral which rose from the ashes.

That story – and others like it – will be in the minds of many as we look with deep sadness at the ashes of the almost-destroyed Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. People – even in a very secular country like France – were moved to silence, to tears, to prayer. The historian Tom Holland [tweeted](https://twitter.com/holland_tom/status/1117876825680572417): “A building like Notre Dame attests to our yearning as beings who are born and die to defy the inexorability of what the Romans termed the ‘*saeculum*’: the limits of mortal memory.” Ancient buildings meet our need to feel that we can somehow be bigger and more significant than our limited lifespan.

Like St Paul’s, Notre Dame will surely rise again. Not perhaps as quickly as President Macron suggests. You can’t just go out and get a new one. You have to mourn a loss before you can look for the new – not immediately seeking the living among the dead. And Cathedrals – and churches – are much more than buildings. They hold the story – they can’t be as they advertise new houses in Ireland – a turn-key development – just get your mortgage and walk in.

The women went in love and devotion to care for and honour Jesus’ body. What they found was the empty tomb – and the two men in dazzling robes who said, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead’. Jesus is not here – and nor, surprisingly, is the resurrection gospel. In John’s gospel there is the account of how Mary Magdalene recognises Jesus, thinking him to be the gardener. Again there is the challenge to see resurrection on a wider canvas – poet Ann Lewin puts these words into the mouth of Jesus:

Do not cling ..

Let me be bigger than your

Heart can hold

Rise with me to a

Larger vision

So what I have been learning in Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter this year is about how resurrection is not just about putting back what has died – as if to say, ‘So that’s all right then’.

A ruined Cathedral has to be mourned before a new Cathedral rises carrying with it a new part of the story. Those whom we have loved and lost have to be mourned and mourned deeply – and somewhere in the midst of that there grows a deep assurance that there is a new life in Christ. And we who gather round the Lord’s Table today know ourselves to be but a tiny part of the great company of all God’s people living and departed.

Somewhere in the midst of this is what the resurrection gospel says about the life of this congregation. On one level, President Macron was right. If you lose a building you can replace it. Harder if you pass through a difficult period in your life, if you are bereaved, if you face life-changing or life-limiting illness …. And for a congregation, there is a need to mourn the period when everything seemed to be just fine, everything seemed familiar, secure, cohesive … And then a series of things happen which profoundly disturb that familiarity and those certainties.

It is understandable and natural to want to restore things the way they were – to believe that if we keep on doing exactly what we have always done we will keep alive what we have lost. But it can’t be that way. That’s why the faithful women who came to anoint the body of Jesus were asked, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’ You won’t find the answer by rooting around in what you used to have. Or as Ann Lewin’s verse says:

Do not cling ..

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I don’t find that a comfortable message – and you probably won’t either. But it is rooted in an absolute faith in the resurrection gospel. Resurrection is not a preservation project – nor a restoration and rebuilding project. It is God’s call to us to reach out for the new life which is an integral part of our baptism – baptised into the death of Christ that we may walk with him in the newness of his risen life.

I can’t tell you where the new life is to be found. I know only that it is to be found. And that it won’t be found by clinging .. I know that it will be found by people who take their faith in both hands and live it in hope. And I know that when it is found it will have the vitality and integrity of the authentic resurrection life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ