From Wilderness to Resurrection Hope

Easter Day: New Life, New Possibilities

Readings: Jeremiah 31. 1-6, Colossians 3.1-4, John 20. 1-18

Preface

The reflection that you are about to hear was recorded at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre 10 days before the outbreak of the current war, started by the USA and Israeli military action against Iran. Currently, all the holy sites within the Old City of Jerusalem are closed as a public safety measure. This includes the Western Wall and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Today, I'm stood in the ruins of Coventry's Medieval cathedral, destroyed by enemy bombing on the night of November 14, 1940. Reflecting on that awful night Provost Richard Howard wrote in his diary "As I went into the ruined Cathedral on the morning after the destruction, there flashed into my mind the deep certainty that as the Cathedral had been crucified with Christ, so it would rise again with Him. How or when, we could not tell; nor did it matter. The Cathedral would rise again."

This is steadfast resurrection hope. The Cathedral did rise again and resurrection song is woven into its very fabric - the stone, concrete and exquisite stained glass. This building is testament to the fact that bombs, hatred and war do not have the final word. The Cathedral ruins are testament to the scars we carry but as they have also become a place of calm and peace for the people of this city, they bear witness to the transforming power of love, forgiveness and reconciliation.

This Easter let's continue to pray for the people of the Middle East in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I'm standing here at the Church of the Resurrection also known as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a place that has carried the memory of death and resurrection down two millennia. The stones beneath my feet have held centuries of tears, prayers, and wonder. Christians across time have come here with the same longing, the longing for new life, new beginnings, and new possibilities.

It is fitting that the journey we have travelled this Lent from wilderness, through struggle, through listening, through opening our eyes, choosing life, and letting go should end here, in the place where resurrection life burst from the tomb.

Our readings today invite us to see the world through resurrection eyes. Through the words of Jeremiah God says to the Israelites, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" Jeremiah is speaking to a people bruised by exile, weighed down by loss and uncertainty. And into that heaviness, God speaks a word that feels almost impossible: "I will build you up again…

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You shall take up your tambourines and go out in the dance of the merrymakers." New life. New joy. New possibility. Not because the people have earned it or achieved it, but because God's love has not run out.

Standing here at the site of the empty tomb, Jeremiah's promise feels astonishingly present. Because resurrection is God's loudest declaration that despair does not have the final word. Even in the places where everything looks finished, God plants seeds of hope.

This truth is lived out every day by Embrace the Middle East's Christian partners. In places overshadowed by conflict, poverty, displacement, and uncertainty, they dare to believe that God can build again. They dare to dance, sometimes quietly, sometimes painfully, on ground that others call hopeless. And every act of care, every class taught, every medical consultation, every counselling session, every warm welcome to someone who feels forgotten, each one is its own small tambourine of resurrection joy.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul calls us to lift our gaze, not to escape the world, but to see it truthfully. To see that Christ's risen life is not just an event in history, but a reality that reshapes how we live today. "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." To put it another way; our old narratives, the ones shaped by fear, scarcity, competition, and despair do not define us. Our authentic life is rooted in Christ's resurrected life. And because Christ is risen, new possibilities are always within reach. Not easy possibilities. Not tidy or predictable ones, but real ones.



This is exactly what Embrace's Acts of Hope have been inviting us to do throughout Lent: to listen more deeply, to let go of assumptions, to open ourselves to compassion, to act, even in small ways, for dignity, justice, and peace.

This is resurrection's challenge: to let our imaginations be formed not by the world's cynicism, but by the spaciousness of God's hope.

This is exactly what Embrace's Acts of Hope have been inviting us to do throughout Lent: to listen more deeply, to let go of assumptions, to open ourselves to compassion, to act, even in small ways, for dignity, justice, and peace. Acts of Hope are not naïve. They are resurrection-shaped choices, choices rooted in Christ's life, not in the world's despair.

And then through the writing of St John we come to Mary. Mary who comes to the tomb in the half-light, carrying grief that has hollowed her out. The woman who is crushed by disappointment, believing that death has had the final say.

She encounters the risen Christ and cannot yet see him, until he says her name. In that single moment "Mary" a whole new world opens. Recognition, restoration and possibility. Resurrection does not begin with trumpets and certainty. It begins with the tender use of a friend's name and Mary becomes the first witness of the new creation. The first to say, "I have seen the Lord." The first to discover that even in the most broken places, God is already at work.

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Easter Day: New Life, New Possibilities (continued)

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Every day, across the Middle East, Embrace's partners hear modern-day Marys men, women, children calling out from places of loss, fear, and uncertainty. In the name of the risen Christ, they respond with presence, compassion, and unwavering hope. They can't fix everything. They don't pretend the world isn't complicated. But they do offer the kind of love that makes new life possible.

Here, in the heart of Jerusalem, in the light of the empty tomb, the message of Easter is clear. Resurrection is not the happy ending of a story. It is the beginning of possibility. God speaks to us, just as God spoke to the exiles: "I will build you up again." Christ calls us by name, just as he called Mary. And the Spirit invites us gently but insistently to step into lives shaped by hope rather than fear.

This is the heart of path we have walked this Lent. Not wishful optimism, but resurrection hope, the kind that rolls away stones. So as we celebrate the joy of Easter, may we all continue to live out Acts of Hope as people shaped by Christ's risen life.

And may the God who raised Jesus from the dead open in us and through us new life, new imagination, and new possibilities for all God's people.

Christ is risen. Alleluia. Amen.