



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Low Sunday 2020, 11am Holy Eucharist

Readings:

The First Epistle of St Peter 1.3-9

The Holy Gospel according to St John 20.19-end

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Saint John is unafraid to do his own thing.

His Gospel is beautifully shaped and sculpted – meticulous when looked at in detail, and equally stunning when we step back and see the beauty of the whole shape.

Think of your favourite Barbara Hepworth sculpture. The stunning patina of the tiniest detail, and the beauty of the whole.

St John is unafraid to do his own thing in shaping the narrative of events to make a larger point.

St John has us today ‘when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week’ (20.19). Those words that carry such colour and depth: ‘the first day of the week’. Immediately, he knows, we’ll think of Genesis and the creation narrative. St John is deliberately telling us, this is the first day of God’s *new* creation, a new world order has been established. Death is no longer the end of life, but a beginning.

It is the evening of Easter Day itself.

Those terrifying and confusing and wonderful events were at the dawn of *this* day.

There are some days that feel especially long in a powerful way. I think of my brother or sister’s wedding day. It seemed to be much more than *one* day, from the excited breakfast and getting ready – through the set up, the church service, the meal and party, and finally the cab ride home clutching a bottle of champagne. Surely it can’t all have been only *one* day? Do you know what I mean? Imagine, what they all must be feeling, so many hours later – still carrying all that has happened in the last few days and the last few hours. Hold all of that together in your mind.

Then St John makes his big reveal.

The Risen Jesus stands among them. ‘Peace be with you’. The first words of this new creation? Peace. And again, ‘peace be with you’. This isn’t a vague nicety tripping off

the tongue. This peace is powerful, this peace is important. It is God's peace. It is wholeness and healing and reconciliation. It is a peace that has destroyed death forever and emptied hell. It is what Jesus has come to bring, it is free, it is for all, and it lasts forever. Wow.

And then what happens? Then St John takes Pentecost – the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the church 50 days after Easter – and brings it to the evening of Easter Day. What? St John takes Pentecost, and plonks it in the evening of Easter Day.

The Church (formed of the Mary, the disciples, Mary Magdalene and the others) is still reeling from events. They're not fit for anything but a steadying glass of wine and to try and unpick events amidst the tangle of grief and confusion and fear and wonder.

And yet Jesus says – bang, right there - 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' and breathes on them the Holy Spirit, and gives them the Church's mission and authority – to take that peace: God's forgiveness and mercy to the whole world. The mission that we continue today in every corner of the globe.

And St John gives us all that in just a few verses.

1. **Creation and re-creation** – a new world order has been established. Death is no longer the end of life, but a beginning.
2. The **peace of God** which passes all understanding – God's promise in our lives as individuals and families, to be with us forever.
3. And **Pentecost** – the Church's sending out to be the Body of Christ in and for the world. A mission which is God's own mission done through us by God himself in the form of the Holy Spirit. We, by the way, are just as dazed and incompetent and flawed and unready as the disciples, but it never was about us. It's about God's Spirit – His love and reconciliation working in us and through us.

And St John's amazing account of the evening of Easter has all that put together because all together is exactly where it belongs; because it all comes from the same source. It all comes from the risen Jesus; then and right now.

1. Life after death.
2. The invitation to genuine relationship with God.
3. Our place in the life of the Church – the Sacraments of grace, an invitation to the whole world.

It's a lot to take in. I am feeling a little like the disciples: doubtful, dazed and ill-equipped. You may be too. And just like the disciples. Wherever you are right now? That's the place we begin.

Christ is Risen. Alleluia!