

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Easter Vigil – St George’s Cathedral
11 April 2009

Mk 16:1-8

May I speak in the name of the One God – Creator of life, Redeemer of life and Sustainer of life!

Dear people of God, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the tomb is empty, for Jesus has been raised!

By his death, he has destroyed death; and in his rising, he has brought us immortal life.

This is what makes us Easter people.

As we heard from St Paul’s letter to the Romans:

We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom 6:4,5)

This is the promise of God to us – this is the victory over sin and evil and death, which has been won for us, through Christ’s cross and resurrection.

God’s message is that everywhere, the power of sin, of evil, of death, has been overcome – it will not prevail.

No! What prevails is life, and light, and love and hope – all that is good and true, and honourable, and just, and pure, and excellent, and worthy of praise (to borrow words from St Paul’s letter to the Philippians – Phil 4:8).

But perhaps you are sitting in your seat thinking ‘Hold on there a moment, Archbishop! Is your nose permanently in the pages of your Bible? Take a look at the world around! It doesn’t seem that life and light and love and hope are overcoming evil on every front! Where is this Easter Good News you are talking about?!’

Ah, so now we must return to St Mark’s gospel.

Earlier in his gospel, in chapter 8, we read this:

Jesus then began to teach the disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said this quite openly. (Mark 8:31-2)

This led Peter to say 'This must never happen to you!' to which Jesus responded 'Get behind me, Satan.'

And then, in case we have missed the point, one chapter later, St Mark again tells us that Jesus taught the disciples, saying 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.'

But, adds St Mark, they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him (Mark 9:31-32).

The disciples had been clearly taught that Jesus would die, and be raised – and yet now, in our gospel reading, we hear how they were completely confused and alarmed to find the tomb empty.

And then when the young man told them that Jesus had been raised and would meet them in Galilee, they fled in terror and amazement, and said nothing to anyone!

They could not see the connection between what they had been taught, and what they saw around them.

Well, perhaps we can sympathise with them.

It is not always easy to see the evidence of the power of the resurrection at work in all the complexities of our world.

And let's be honest, life at the moment is particularly confusing!

What are we to make of the events of this week? What about the arms deal, and accusations of corruption, and questionable prosecutorial processes, and the taping of conversations, and the acquisition of those tapes, and goodness knows what other goings on behind the scenes?

Where in all of this do we find life and light and hope, or anything honourable, excellent and worthy of praise?

What does it mean for how we choose to cast our vote in the elections?

Every party promises to improve life – but which ones have the right answers to our problems? Which ones can actually deliver on their fine words?

Perhaps we can use Jesus' own so-called manifesto, as we judge the manifestoes of the parties. Jesus began his ministry quoting from the prophet Isaiah, saying 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has called me to bring good news to the poor, and liberty to the oppressed.'

Which party will best bring good news to all who are in any way impoverished? Which will best bring liberty to all who are in any way oppressed by circumstances?

Through asking questions like these, we can be helped to discern the voice of the one who died and was raised for us.

'Follow me' says Jesus.

Sometimes it is clear and easy to walk his path.

Sometimes the way ahead is hard to find, with difficult challenges, and calls us to deny ourselves and take up our cross as we follow our Lord.

Yet we should not be daunted.

St Paul prays that the Ephesians may understand the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us – for all of us – who believe – which is the same power that was at work in raising Christ from the dead. (Eph 1:19,20)

The same Power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work within us!

This is why we dare to believe that we can make a difference in the world.

This is why we dare to be baptised ourselves, and bring our children to baptism; and dare to reaffirm our own baptismal vows.

Yes, we say, we are Easter people, we are united with Jesus both in his death-destroying death, and in his life-giving life.

'Take up your cross and follow me' Jesus says to us again tonight.

Make the cross count, says Jesus!

Choose the way of the cross that leads from death to life – in the way you mark your ballot paper later this month!

More than this, choose the way of the cross that leads from death to life, not only in your voting, but in every part of your life.

And may we all, as Easter people, shine as lights in the world, tonight, tomorrow and always, for the glory of God the Father.

Amen