

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Easter Vigil, St George's Cathedral**  
**3 April 2010**

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*Gospel - Lk 24:1-12*

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

I wonder how many times you have heard those words?

Later this year, I shall celebrate my 50th birthday. The thought of being quite so old is a little disconcerting, though it is a source of much amusement to my children!

Indeed, I realised this week that tonight is actually my 50th celebration of Easter.

There is a saying that 'familiarity breeds contempt'.

'Contempt' is perhaps too strong a word, but I do find that familiarity with the Easter story tends to anaesthetise me to its impact.

It is sometimes hard to appreciate the disbelief, the amazement, of the first disciples – as we heard in the Gospel reading – at the sheer impossibility of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Well, any complacency I might have had was turned upside-down by my visit to Haiti last month.

Over five days, I encountered death and destruction that was almost impossible to grasp, even though it was before my very eyes.

I cannot describe my emotions, seeing bodies trapped in buildings from which it was too dangerous to move them, feeling my nostrils fill with the stench of rotting flesh.

I went to Haiti to offer support to the Anglican Bishop, Jean-Zaché Duracin, and his clergy and people.

But I found myself learning from their faith in the midst of such heartbreak.

On the Sunday we were there, after our morning Eucharist and lunch, we persuaded Bishop Duracin to show us his home.

It had been a lovely house, but now it was totally collapsed, with all his possessions destroyed, and his car completely flattened. 'It is gone, all gone' he said.

He wept, and I wept too, as he showed where his wife had been trapped.

She was later flown to Florida for medical treatment and for weeks he was denied a US visa to visit her.

Then this brave man pointed to all he had lost and said 'We still have to sing alleluia – for in the midst of this, Christ is risen.'

The Bishop, his clergy, his people, are proclaiming 'Alleluia' in the way they live now.

They weep with those who weep, and mourn with those who mourn, even as they preach the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and raised – through whom their own dead are now safe in the eternally loving arms of God.

And they act so that new life can begin now for those who are left.

- Church hospitals are again up and running – in massive marquees.
- New homes for the disabled have been found, in tents.
- Schools are operating in the tent cities.

The church, strengthened by God and his love, offers a purpose and direction that the government is failing to provide.

As a result, the Gift of the Givers (the South African Relief Organisation, founded by a Muslim) has decided to make Bishop Duracin and his church its partner on the ground.

They are truly an Easter people – proclaiming life in word and deed, even in the face of death.

It is as if, every morning, they wake up and sing (as we have just done) 'Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia' – because they know that the power of the resurrection is greater than the power of devastation and death.

We, in our turn, have an opportunity to be Easter people for the Haitians, through supporting the 'Africa for Haiti' initiative, with which Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane and I are involved.

Now I have come home, challenged by the Christians of Haiti, to consider whether I have become complacent about the power of the resurrection in my own context.

Do I really speak and act as though I believe Jesus is greater than all that we face in this country – the poverty, illness and death, crime, corruption, poor educational facilities for the majority, and more besides?

Can we sing, 'Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia' in all circumstances?

Well, tonight we are here to do just this.

We shall do so in a moment – in the baptism of Riley, Zeke, Chelsea, Audrey, and Isabella.

In baptism we shall declare that we are united with Jesus Christ in his death – and therefore, as our Epistle reading put it, 'if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.'

In baptism we pledge ourselves to the power of life, new life, over death.

We shall also do so as we embark on the Celebration of Creation Renewed: as – through the fifty days between Easter Pentecost – we follow the Calendar of Action and Reflection, and pledge ourselves to be faithful stewards of God's creation.

And each of us can do so – each of us can sing 'Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia' in word and action, in the choices we make, in the way we tackle life, and face the challenges that come our way.

We can be confident that the power of Jesus' resurrection – greater than his death on the cross, greater than the tragedy of Haiti – is at work within us here and now (Eph 1:19,20).

Therefore we can face the future, with all its unknowns, knowing that God will see us through.

This is God's promise for you, Mr Dean, as you embark on retirement.

And it is God's promise to the Cathedral, as you look forward to a new chapter of life.

So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ – let us ask God for new eyes with which to see all that he has done for us.

Let us throw off the complacency of old familiarity, and let us be renewed afresh with the resurrection life of Easter.

And let us, today, tomorrow, and always, be those who sing, in word and action, in the way we live our lives, that 'Jesus Christ is risen today'.

Alleluia, Christ is risen – **he is risen indeed, Alleluia**