

Vicar's Letter #5: 17 April, 2020



Dear Parishioners

“Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!!” We have missed sharing this joyful Easter greeting in our Easter services, but it is true nevertheless. Christ is risen from the dead, and the world has changed as a result.

This week a friend sent me an article (ebook) by Professor N. T. Wright, who is a leading British scholar on the New Testament and a former Bishop of Durham. I found it very stimulating reading. The article was entitled *Resurrection and the Renewal of Creation*, and it can be found online at:

<https://ntwrightonline.org/portfolio-items/resurrection-and-the-renewal-of-creation-ebook/> .

Professor Wright challenges the common concept of life after death as “going to heaven”. He makes the point that the New Testament writers thought of Christ’s resurrection as the beginning of the new creation, the new heaven and new earth, which God is inaugurating. We are used to thinking of our present world as something that will wear out, while the faithful will enjoy eternity as blessed souls in heaven with God, but Wright talks about the biblical understanding that God’s plan through Christ is to restore the world as a new creation that will not be subject to sickness, corruption or death.

“God will do for the whole of creation, at the last, what he did for Jesus at Easter - taking the physical reality that had been broken and smashed beyond belief, rescuing it and restoring it so that it wasn’t just in the same state as before, but was actually renewed, having gone beyond the reach of corruption and decay altogether” (p. 11).

That concept had a lot of resonance for me, in this time of coronavirus. A bit like the first disciples (John 20:19-31), we are in lockdown and even fearful. Many of us are wondering what will happen to us and to our world. While we see the prospect of things getting better, we don’t know whether there will be a “second wave” of the virus, which will complicate the world’s recovery. But the resurrection reminds us that God took decisive action in our history and inaugurated a new creation beginning with Jesus Christ. Christ is at work now to bring about this new creation, which admittedly has not yet come in its fullness, but will come in all its glory at the end of time. There will be no ‘second wave’ of corruption or death after that. All will be renewed and will remain renewed eternally. What a vision for the Church to hold! No wonder that Professor Wright thinks that the Church needs to have just as great a commitment to celebrating the fifty days of Easter as we have to observing the forty days of Lent.

One of the implications of this thoroughly biblical view of the resurrection is that the Church has a part to play. Our focus is not to be on ‘how we get to heaven’ but on how we share in working towards the new creation. We are to care for the planet in all its glory and beauty, in its suffering and its need for renewal. And we are to pay particular attention to the last, the lost and the least, for whom God has always had a particular care.

At this moment in our history, there is increasing need in our country and beyond it. The Church will truly show the self-giving nature of Christ and the purpose of his death and resurrection when we care for those in need of any sort. Perhaps it is particularly at this time, when many members of the Church are sensing their own levels of need, that an attitude of compassion and justice for all will most clearly reveal the love of God in Christ.

In our weekly Newslink, we have been adding an extra prayer from the New Zealand Prayer Book at the top, which we feel has particular meaning at the present moment. Today I chose the following prayer:

Christ, you are risen from the dead.

We are risen with you.

May our life never deny this eternal life,
this peace and hope and joy.

Praise and glory to the God of life,
who is stronger than all kinds of death. Alleluia!

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Thanks

I would also like to thank the many parishioners who have been working to connect people through Zoom groups, phone calls and other means of contact. Thank you to those who have posted videos and reflections on the parish website (<http://www.stjames.net.nz/>), to help us enter more deeply into the meaning of Jesus' passion and resurrection. Thanks also to our office staff and others who continue to support the life of the parish at this difficult time.

Finally, it could be that we are entering into the final week of our level 4 lockdown in Aotearoa New Zealand. Let's continue to focus on doing what we need to do at this stage, so that others can be safe, well, and happy. And let's keep praying for those who are guiding our country at this very challenging time.

With my warm greetings in Christ.

Peter Bengé
Vicar