



THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

Read the Archbishop's sermon at the Easter Day Sung Eucharist at Canterbury Cathedral this morning.

As prepared - check against delivery:

On 3 March this year President Zelensky gave a speech in which he declared, 'The end of the world has arrived.'

It wasn't just the bombs, the air strikes, the 40 mile long convoy of Russian troops advancing towards the capital. It wasn't just the need for millions to flee for their lives, or the evident impotence of the nations of the world to do anything to stop the destruction; it was the fact that this threat came from their neighbours, their brothers, those who they shared a common history and purpose. All that they knew was not only under threat. It was being obliterated; 'the end of the world had arrived.'

And we know what they are experiencing has been experienced in even great magnitude by Syrians and South Sudanese, by Afghans and those having to flee from Myanmar – those for whom the end of the world has arrived.

In the dark of that first Easter Sunday morning Mary's world had already ended.

Jesus had been crucified – and in the death of Jesus everything seemed lost. The disciples were scattered and fearful, only Mary and some other women had gone to the tomb. The greatest event ever in the world's history was to be revealed to those that society counted for little. The new world, where justice reigns and hope lives, was to be experienced first by a woman in tears of despair who had seen the greatest injustice.

Not just for her personally. In his death, violence seemingly triumphed, physical force won, hatred and fear overcame love and hope. It seemed there was no justice.

Yet our world - for all its injustices - is not left to its own devices, as if all we could ever look forward to was the things we could bring about ourselves. If it is we would simply acknowledge on repeat, 'the end of the world has arrived' – for which of us doesn't recognise the powerlessness of individuals and nations in front of destructive evil?

But the Easter message is that what we cannot do has been brought into the world by God.

For Christ Jesus is alive with the life of the world to come. A life where every tear is wiped away, every injustice righted, every evil exposed and judged and banished. And through Jesus a new future is set for the whole world. The resurrection promises each nation that the injustices of this world, its cruelties, its evil deeds perpetrated by evil people, and evil deeds through soulless institutions, do not have the last word.

Not only his blood stained grave clothes are left behind in the tomb but all of our grave clothes.

This is what we proclaim at Easter. It is a season of life and hope, of repentance and renewal. This week in the Eastern Orthodox world it is Holy Week, the greatest time for repentance. Muslims are in Ramadan, a time for purification and change, coming to Eid. Jews celebrate the Passover and liberation. Let this be a time for Russian ceasefire, withdrawal and a commitment to talks. This is a time for resetting the ways of peace, not for what Bismarck called blood and iron. Let Christ prevail! Let the darkness of war be banished.

And this season is also why there are such serious ethical questions about sending asylum seekers overseas. The details are for politics. The principle must stand the judgement of God and it cannot. It cannot carry the weight of resurrection justice, of life conquering death. It cannot carry the weight of the resurrection that was first to the least valued, for it privileges the rich and strong. And it cannot carry the weight of our national responsibility as a country formed by Christian values, because sub-contracting out our responsibilities, even to a country that seeks to do well like Rwanda, is the opposite of the nature of God who himself took responsibility for our failures.

Suppose this is so. Suppose the evil and injustice which is so dark, so deceitful, so disgraceful has been defeated.

Because Jesus is alive the promise is that the world of darkness is not ultimately triumphant.

This causes us to say to all who perpetuate evil – You will not win.

Your hatred will not triumph. Your lies will be exposed. Your power will be broken and you will categorically fail. You will face justice. Forever.

Dictators who rule by fear, violence and cruelty – you will lose. Despite nuclear weapons, armies which number in the tens of thousands, superior fire power or the ability and will to raze cities to the ground.

Christ Jesus who was crucified has been raised to life by God the Father in the power of the Spirit.

The victory of goodness and love has been guaranteed.

The defeat of evil is assured.

Injustice is defeated.

The end of the old world has arrived.

Our greatest challenge is to live in a world where this new reality is our central most determining reality. To live in a way that seeks justice, that values the vulnerable, that struggles for justice.

Easter makes another future not just a dream, but an achievable reality. The world characterised by sin, evil and injustice will not always be the case. In the middle of human history God raised his Son Jesus – therefore promising a future we could not make possible.

Even in the middle of the darkness of these times we see glimmers and threads of this gold.

Maybe there can be an ending of a world where we turn away from the refugee, the end of a world where we don't care, the end of the world where propaganda wins, where dictators can assume that everyone will simply be kept in check by the threat of arrest and violence.

Hope gives an eternal purpose to each human being because hope is sown by God and its harvest is a life of living in the power of the resurrection.

May the power of the Holy Spirit by which God raised his crucified son strengthen our hearts to witness to his Easter hope across the world – that we may leave behind the bloodied graveclothes of the world that has ended – and live out of the hope of a world renewed and healed which only God can make possible.

5 min read

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/sermons/archbishops-easter-sermon-canterbury-cathedral-sung-eucharist>

Page