



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

The Bishop's Easter Message

March 31, 2024

“Early in the morning on the first day of the week...”

Dear friends,

These words begin the story of life. They begin the story of Jesus' new resurrected life of course, but they also begin the first believer's stories too. And they begin ours—as the church. Because the Resurrection is not only an historical event but it's something that has present and future importance. Truly.

I'm not sure if we always live in that knowledge. It can seem like Easter is a celebration of something that has happened—not something that is happening.

Why does it matter? What does it mean to say that Jesus saved us from sin, and the death it brings? But bears thinking about because you have to see the dark to appreciate the light.

Sin in this world takes many forms. A shorthand would be that it is anything that we worship in the place of God; sin is that which pulls us from God and from God's people and community.

It's seductive and insidious—often dressed up in things or systems that promise so much but deliver so little. Sin is often cumulative, and it becomes ever more corrosive until it owns your soul and you wake up one day and know that you are separated from the love of God and probably a bunch of other things or other people too.

By contrast, through the good news of the Gospel, Jesus showed us how to walk in God's ways. Walking with Jesus, the risen Christ, is quite simply the way to defeat the damage that sin does to us.

It's important to consider this because if we're going to grasp what the Resurrection is all about, we have to explore the things that take us away from God so that we can understand why Jesus needed to put us right again with God.

Jesus brings new order to the old chaos, new life to the old wastelands. To the ways in which we have laid waste to our own lives—relationships that have gone wrong, to the unfulfilled expectations or hopes that we drag around with us to the more corporate wastelands of war and violence in all those places that where humanity is suppressed and oppressed—to all the 'isms' with which we struggle—sexism, racism, dehumanizing capitalism and the rest.

Jesus is risen to re-order all that; to redeem and recultivate those wastelands and make them something beautiful and full of promise.

In fact, that re-ordering is what happened to the disciples. The Resurrection was an incredibly important event for the disciples but it wasn't a once only event in the past. Its consequences are lived out here and now for all disciples of Christ.

As one scholar says, "the promise of the resurrection is not simply what God has done, but what God is still doing, still leading us forward into new life and possibility and forgiveness and love."

And that matters because Jesus' Resurrection tells us that this world matters. You see the Resurrection is a break. It's a break with what was; it's the beginning to a new world. In truth it's actually the beginning of a revolution—a long revolution that we are still in the midst of that promises a new heaven and a new earth as Isaiah says and that powers and principalities will be set right.

And that's important. You see even if we are comfortable with the idea that Jesus came to put us right with God—personally, I'm not sure we realize that God's field of vision is much, much wider than that. Jesus came to put all the systems of which we are a part right with God too. Jesus came to redeem human systems. Not with might, but with profound right—God's right.

That's why a real, bodily Resurrection is so important—to me and to you and to the church. That's how we know the work of the cross has been accomplished. That Jesus has risen in his body—the body that walked among real people healing, and showing real people what God's love is really like—that body risen showing that this world, with its created order and disorder matters to God.

That heaven and the created order on earth are united in Jesus' Resurrection.

It's a lot to take in. But I just wanted this year, a year in which we see the suffering violence and war in Ukraine and the Land of the Holy One, to say that the Resurrection matters, not just as an historical event, but as something that has an importance that goes on affecting who we are as followers of Christ now today—it goes on affecting how we are as the church in this world. It's why we say, with joy in our hearts, but also knowing it's a mandate: Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Niagara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross-like mark at the beginning of the first letter.

The Right Reverend Dr. Susan J. A. Bell
Bishop of Niagara