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## RECTOR'S LETTER

### *An Easter People*

Well Spring has certainly arrived, and, even if we are largely confined to our homes, most of us will nevertheless have been enjoying the warm, pleasant weather. Spring is a popular time of year for many people, and despite the current COVID-19 crisis, it's hard not to be cheered up by the warm, dry and sunny weather of recent days, and the sight of new life "springing-up" all around us, is encouraging too. Indeed, new life is breaking out everywhere we look, not just the green shoots and buds, but also the primroses and tulips in the church yard, which are starting to blossom in number now.

But there's another aspect of new life that demands our attention at this time of year, and that of course, is the new life we have in Christ. And "new life in Christ" isn't just a trite, religious platitude, but is a serious and real promise - a reality, grounded in an astonishing series of historical events.

Holy Week and Easter is a time of year, when we remind ourselves once more that Jesus of Nazareth was a real man, who walked and talked, ate and slept like the rest of us. Who, after a remarkable ministry of healing and teaching, was arrested by the Jewish leaders, convicted during a sham trial, and then executed at the age of 33, on the authority of the Roman Governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. His death was witnessed by the large crowds that had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover. After dying on the Cross and He was taken down and buried in a nearby tomb. Yet, despite the very public death; despite the fact the tomb was sealed with a huge stone and guarded by Roman soldiers, Jesus was seen again by His disciples, and others, just three days later - alive and well. These are all historical facts.

The truth is that Jesus had risen from the dead, just as He said He would. His astonishing Resurrection is an historical event, witnessed by those who were there at the time. John, one of the twelve apostles wrote:

*"That which... we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us." (1 John 1:1-3).*

Death, the final and greatest enemy of mankind, had now been conquered. Take comfort in the fact that death is not the last word. Beyond the grave lies another life, eternal life and Jesus, known as 'The Christ', is the gateway - the only gateway in fact - to that gift of life beyond death. His death and His blood can cleanse and forgive those who put their faith and hope in Him, and He in turn promises to raise them from the dead, just as He Himself rose. Jesus' Resurrection, and the promise of eternal life after death, are at the very heart of the Christian message.

A modern trend, however, has been to play this aspect of our faith down and concentrate instead on life now; but this is a mistake. Without the promise of forgiveness and eternal life; without the promise of resurrection from the dead, our faith is robbed of any real value and we become little more than well-meaning people peddling a message of morality.

Whilst we should be both of these (well-meaning and moral) there is so much more to our message. The Gospel (meaning 'Good news') that we proclaim, is one of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life - real eternal life, a "you can be raised from the dead" eternal life. As St. Paul said:

*"If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." (1 Cor 15:16-19).*

Whilst as Christian our life should have an impact on those around us, our faith is not just for this life, and our true home is not this world, but the world to come. So central is this message to the Gospel, that the early Christians were called the Resurrection People, the Easter People. And so powerful was this message of forgiveness and resurrection from the dead, that in just a few short generations the Christian faith had completely transformed the ancient Mediterranean world, and eventually even overcame the mighty Roman Empire itself. And that Gospel message has not changed and never will – at least not until Christ Himself returns again. I wish you all a happy, joyful and blessed Easter!