

Second Sunday of Easter

An accountant got out of bed one morning and complained that he had not slept a wink. "Why didn't you count sheep?" his wife asked. "I did, and that's what got me into trouble," the accountant replied. "I made a mistake the first hour, and it took until morning to correct it."

I like that story. The accountant lives in two worlds. Dreaming and not dreaming. And he is trying to be a good accountant in both.

St Peter knew about living in two worlds. Or two countries. Citizens of this present age, where there is sin and suffering and death. Citizens of the coming Kingdom where there is forgiveness and healing, justice and peace. Christians are citizens of both. Easter does that for you.

1 Peter 1. 3-5

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Christians live a double life: The life we live in Hartpury, Hasfield or Herefordshire. And the life we live in the new post Easter world, the world of God's recreation.

And we are completely our self in both.

God's writ, God's kingdom, runs fully and joyfully in this world and the next. St Peter tells us that God is gifting us, at Easter, 'an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading'.

So Christians having dual citizenship is no problem. After Easter, Christ is the Lord of both of this world and the next. God has chosen us to have this special dual nationality.

Many years ago, a beloved Pope died. Saint Peter greeted him at the doors of heaven. "Welcome your holiness, your dedication and unselfishness in serving your church has earned you great stature in heaven. You may pass through the gates without delay, and you have full access to our heavenly Father. Is there anything which your holiness desires?"

"Well, yes," the Pope replied. "I have often pondered on the mysteries which have confounded theologians throughout the ages. Are there transcripts of conversations between God and the prophets? I would love to know what was actually said."

St. Peter immediately ushered the Pope into the heavenly library. The Pope was thrilled and settled down to review humanity's relationship with God.

Two years later, a scream of anguish pierced the quiet of the library. Immediately saints and angels came running. They found the Pope pointing to a single word on a parchment, repeating over and over:

"There's an 'R'. There's an 'R.' There's an 'R'... It's **CELIBRATE**, not celibate!"

This leads me to my second "seeing double" at Easter. After Easter the past and the present collide. The past is fulfilled in the present.

'Jesus ... stood among them and said "Peace be with you"'. At this moment past and present collide.

For on Good Friday Jesus was absent. And the disciples were fearful and isolated. And even on Easter Day the disciples were living behind lock doors.

Wonderfully, the fearful past ended, with the risen Jesus present in the home. At Easter, the risen Lord Jesus is amazingly present as he says "peace be with you". The God of peace is alive and *very present* - "peace be with you". *Jesus is our peace*. And because the risen Lord is God's peace, his presence overcomes, overwhelms, our fearful troubled past.

Before I finish, here is a story about living in the present:

During the Second World War, a baby was born to a woman whose husband had been called up. He did not see his dad for three years. The boy's mother tried to ease this loss with a little ritual every bedtime. Every night, after putting on his pyjamas, the boy would say his prayers, and then kiss the picture of his dad goodnight, before tumbling into bed.

This went on for three years.

Then came the great day when dad returned home. That night dad joined in the bedside ritual.

Mum said, "Now you can kiss your father good night".

The boy ran over to the picture, kissed the photo, then jumped into bed – leaving his dad standing with open but empty arms.

For seven weeks, from Easter to Pentecost, the risen Jesus appeared to his friends. Weeks of waiting for the Holy Spirit to come on them in power.

As the disciples prayed "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven", they prayed as citizens of this world and the next.

The pandemic lock down, we now know, will continue in the UK for three more weeks, probably the seven weeks to Pentecost.

In these days of Easter, let Jesus remain very present in your life. He is our Easter peace.

Give yourself time to pray in the kingdom: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven". We too are citizens of this world and the next.

Jesus is alive! He is risen indeed!

The reality of Jesus is much bigger after Easter.

When Jesus tells Mary Magdalene 'do not cling to me', or to the disciples 'do not touch me', Jesus is saying, 'we cannot live in the past'.

The disciples cannot cling on to the Jesus they once knew.

And we too do not possess Jesus. After Easter, Christ's Easter peace *possesses us*.

In believing that Jesus has died for us, our troubled past is wiped away. And we live in the eternal present/presence of Christ's Easter peace.

After Easter we cannot touch and hold onto Jesus.

After Easter Christ *holds the church*; he holds the church at home in lockdown, in his Easter peace.

Hallelujah, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, hallelujah!