

Easter 3 WW Alison's farewell.

“We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song”

Words of St Augustine made famous by Pope John 11

We are an Easter people because not just on Easter Sunday or in this the Easter season or just on Sundays but **every day** is lived in the knowledge of the resurrection and all that it means.

The resurrection of Christ was a turning point not just for our calendar – our year was not BC but one of the two thousand and twenty four years of our Lord - AD ‘Anno Domini.’ The resurrection means that we can live knowing our sins are forgiven and that Jesus is with us both here and into the eternal life that he has won for us. That is surely a reason to sing Alleluia

On Easter Sunday, those who were at the service at Bledlow Ridge may remember I thought about those words that Jesus spoke to Mary “Do not hold on to me” She had followed Jesus faithfully even to the foot of the cross, weeping, she had watched as he was laid in the tomb – she returns to do her final act of love but the tomb is empty.

She now has the heart-stopping joy of seeing him alive again and she wants everything to go back to just how it was before.

But that cannot be. It's not possible. Everything is different.

Mary had to learn as we all have to learn, that she could not hold on to the Jesus she once knew. Now she had to face a painful time of change – to learn to trust and experience a Jesus she would be unable to see but who would still be close.

In today's gospel we see a similar moment for the disciples. They gather together, frightened and full of regret. They had all deserted the one who had given them so much. They must have felt that their relationship with Jesus was over. Then Jesus appears and his first words are "Peace be with you". These are words of reconciliation that were to assure the disciples of the Lord's forgiveness. He goes on to show them that all that has happened was foretold by the prophets and that the wounds that he bares were part of the path that led to this moment. Now he would be with them always but in a new and wonderful way.

Assured of God's love and forgiveness the disciples are enabled to go out to share that amazing good news with others. They become the first Easter people and we are the inheritors of both their assurance and their mission.

God is continually with us, beckoning us on and encouraging us forward to explore greater depths of his love and to go on to share with others the amazing news that love has conquered death and we are accepted, loved and forgiven.

It was a moment of great change – they had to find new ways of living – new ways to go forward.

And Peter, in our reading from Acts, tells us how they did it By faith in his name. That is by believing in the resurrection through which Christ is able to be with us and assure us of forgiveness and acceptance and to lead us to eternal life with him.

We, as a community, parish and benefice are at a moment of great change. Soon Penny will be joining us and today we say farewell to Alison. Things are not going to be the same. It is hard to know what the future will hold. For Alison to discover the way forward in a new place and with a different community – we assure her of our prayers and continued friendship. For us, we will need to discover how and who will fill the one hundred and one gaps, as we discover many things that Alison has been doing for us so efficiently for so long. We also need to be ready and open to respond to our new Rector and any new ways forward that she may want to introduce.

Like Mary we may be hoping to go back to how things were, but we must recognise that things are different and that change is necessary for growth. We have the example of Mary and the first disciples, their faith and trust in God led them in to the unknown and because of them we are the Easter people of this generation.

I can only quote from the poem by Minnie Haskins made famous by King George VI as the country faced war –

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the
unknown".

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the
Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a
known way".

Alleluia! Christ is risen.