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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : April 4th, 2021
“Easter Sunday”

EASTER DAY 2021

A true story of the late Mervyn Stockwood, former bishop of Southwark. He had gone to Russia with a parliamentary delegation. It was still an atheistic state. He had forgotten to pack his electric razor and so went to the salon in the hotel to be shaved. He wrote in his diary: ‘There were two hairdressers, one male, one female. The man already had a client. Here was a dilemma. I am enthusiastic for sex equality, even when it comes to the ordination of women; but to be helpless in a chair with a woman wielding a cut-throat razor is another matter. However, I had no alternative and I know now what real commitment means. As the soap-coupled beard mounted on the blade, the woman looked intently at me, especially at my pectoral cross and episcopal ring. She consulted her partner at the neighbouring chair, and hurrying back, asked me, through an interpreter, whether I was a bishop. It was the Easter season and the Orthodox Church, perhaps more than the others, celebrates the Resurrection with intensity. Taking my cross in her hand, she kissed it, and then raising the razor blade aloft, with the soap and my beard still on it, called out, ‘Christ is Risen.’ Whereupon the other customers joyfully responded, ‘He is risen indeed’. I thought ‘Poor old Brezhnev, sixty years of atheism and still the Galilean conquers!’ . . . Still the Galilean conquers! Despite all that can be thrown at the Christian faith, still the Galilean conquers.

It is true that this year our Holy Week observations have been understandably more muted than in previous years. Yet still the Galilean conquers. And that remains the message that we proclaim. The events of the first Easter Day were so completely amazing and impossible that people are still talking about it 2000 years after it happened. Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is alive . . . still the Galilean conquers. Still today the story of Easter has a spellbinding feel to it, even in our humanistic, post-Christian age, even to those who have lived with the yearly events of Holy Week and Easter all their lives.

At the heart of our celebrations today are those eight spine tingling verses of Mark's chapter 16 that have just been read, the oldest story of the Resurrection: of the discovery, by the women, of the empty tomb, the appearance of a young man dressed in white whose message of reassurance causes them to flee in their terror and bewilderment, saying nothing to anyone because they are so afraid.

And despite our doubts and anxieties and uncertainties – and perhaps at times our fear – the plain truth is that the Lord is risen, he is risen indeed, alleluia – and we must be full of faith and courage as we not only speak those words but also seek to live them in and through our lives – so that the story of Jesus will live on in us.

St Teresa of Avila articulated it like this: *“Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now”*.

May Easter come alive for others around us because we don't just say those words but we have the courage to live them? For still the Galilean conquers!

Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, alleluia.