

Easter Day 2015, Portsmouth Cathedral

“The disciples returned to their homes.”

Lately at my home and office, Bishopsgrove, I must confess that my theological life has been somewhat diminished. A colleague who can usually be relied upon to engage in intelligent conversation has, for reasons what are not entirely clear to me, set aside their theology books in favour of reading about insects. So when I ask what they have been reading, instead of being treated to a thoughtful insight into the resurrection or pondering an interesting take on community and society, I find myself learning about male spiders tying female spiders down with silk in order to avoid being eaten while they mate; or the extraordinary navigational gifts of the bumble bee. My colleague, it seems, has made a bid for freedom, swapping dry text books for the boundless possibilities for life in the animal kingdom. Resurrection of one kind I guess, but not over helpful to a beleaguered bishop wrestling with questions of life and death, not to mention an Easter Day sermon.

Today on Easter Day, we celebrate an event that seems altogether contrary to the laws of nature in which my colleague is immersed. A man is tortured and dies horribly on the cross. His body is sealed in a tomb. And then on the third day, the heavy tomb stone is rolled away and the dead man has come back to life. It is, at least according to the laws of nature as we know it, a complete impossibility. Scientific truth as we understand it cannot take this literally, and, together with the virgin birth and other miracles, our affirmation of the truth of the resurrection has, on occasion, exposed Christians to more than a little ridicule.

Yet here we are today, gathered in great numbers with brass and tympani, clergy all in our finest, to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. We gather baffled somewhat by the mystery, yet affirming a belief that we instinctively know to be true: that life really can emerge out of death; that hope really can emerge from within the depths of the worst suffering.

That conviction is audacious to say the least. We have all been horrified by the recent plane crash, in which a suicidal pilot took his own life and murdered so many others. Also by the massacre of an almost identical number of Kenyan students by al-Shabab in Garissa. The ongoing violence in Syria, including last month's slaughter of Coptic Christians in Iraq, the horrendous acts of Islamic State – there by the way is a double misnomer and blatant propaganda, neither truly of Islam nor a state - and so many other situations in our world speak to us of hopelessness, of spiralling violence, of seemingly irredeemable suffering small scale as well as national and global. Many of us bring to church today hearts hurting with our own pain or bearing it for others. The animal world my colleagues learns about shares with the human world an inexhaustible gift for extreme cruelty and for inflicting injustice.

Which is, of course, why the gospel we proclaim is so necessary and so radical. Last night here in the cathedral, nine candidates were baptised and many others were confirmed. Those candidates publicly declared that they turn away from all that is destructive in the world, and towards all that is life giving in Christ. That turning, which we call repentance, is central to what we believe and to who you and I are, and in it we mimic the turnover we celebrate today from death to life. We declare that the

cruelty of the world does not and cannot have the last word. We affirm that God's commitment to love is so powerful that he disrupted the laws of nature as we know them, bringing his Son back from the dead and challenging us to embrace the fullness of life that Jesus calls us into. In this uplifting and inspiring service we commit ourselves to living that truth and sharing that ministry, and we pledge to do so tomorrow as well, each Monday morning and every day.

So happy Easter to you, to those with whom you will share this day – please give them my Easter greetings and ours. And when in a short while you dive into your Easter egg hunts, your Sunday roasts, and return to your homes, I urge you not to lose sight of the challenge that this day poses to you and to me, to live each day as risen people in a hurting world.

Bishop Christopher