

TFTD L32: Easter Day



Christ the Lord is risen today: Hallelujah!

Thought you might like this wonderful Easter garland which appeared in church today.

Robin's Easter sermon rounds off our Lenten series of TFTD. Many thanks to all our contributors — especially Rod Hill, who retires from his role in Alderley Edge this month. Rod has played a stalwart role in keeping TFTD going right from the beginning — we shall miss him!



Acts 10: 34-43

We read in Luke's Gospel that when they crucified Jesus he said, 'Forgive them Father for they don't know what they are doing.'

Which is an incredible thing to say really. As people are killing you, to pray that God will forgive the people who are killing you, that's an amazing thing to do.

It's a very powerful gesture, is it not?

One of the thieves who was being crucified alongside Jesus was certainly very impressed by these words. There were people making fun of Jesus as he died, and the thief told them off.

And then he said to Jesus; 'Remember me when you come into your Kingdom'. And Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Which is a really nice thing to say when you are dying. It's really impressive to find the strength to offer words of encouragement to another human being who is suffering with you.

Even if the story ended there, it would be a story worth telling. A story about a man who went about healing the sick and talking about the Kingdom of God, a better way for us to live together. A man who went to Jerusalem to proclaim this kingdom only for the authorities to cynically have him put to death. A story that ends with this man offering forgiveness to his executioners and hope to those being executed with him right up until the end. Even that would be a story worth telling.

But the story does not end there. Because God raised Jesus on the third day and allowed him to appear to those who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

And because of that those who were chosen by God to see and be with the risen Christ knew for certain that when Jesus had told them that he was the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead he was telling the truth.

And that changes everything.

Because it means that when Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do;' it wasn't just a nice thing to say; he wasn't saying, 'I hope and pray that God forgives them.' He was saying that those people who crucified Jesus really were forgiven because Jesus, ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead had asked that they be forgiven.

And when Jesus said to the thief 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise,' he wasn't just been nice. He wasn't saying 'I hope and pray that God lets us both into paradise.' He was telling the thief that he was actually going to paradise. It was actually going to happen.

And that changed everything. Everything changed from that moment on when people began to see that Jesus had in fact been raised from the dead. From that moment people knew that they could follow Jesus certain of victory and certain of the gift of life.

The first Christian martyr was Stephen. This is what he said when he was dying. 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Because he knew he was about to see Jesus in paradise and he wanted those around him to know that he knew. And then he said, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'. And he said that because he remembered what Jesus had said and he knew that Jesus was the judge of all our souls.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Everything has changed. And means that everything has changed for us as well.

The judge of our souls has forgiven us. And he has promised us life with him. It's a new life. A life in which we are set free from the sin that used to control us. A new life with Jesus.

Have we done things that we wish we had not done? Of course, we have. Do we have regrets? Of course, we do. But then we remember that Jesus forgives us our sins and promises us that we will be with him and we know that this will happen because he was the one who rose from the dead.

A few days ago, somebody who doesn't go to church, asked me what the people who come to this church are like. What kind of people come to church, she asked.

And I thought about it for a bit and I thought about some of you and wondered what I could say about you. And then I said, well they're just ordinary people really; just a normal mix of different kinds of people. And then I said, but what they all have in common is a faith, and sometimes this faith is stronger than at other times, but they all have faith that God loves them, and forgives them and wants to be with them and that means that there is a way of being a better person than they used to be and if they try they can find that path and take that path. They are not really any better than other people to start out with, it's just that they don't accept that they have to always be the way they were.

I was trying to explain our faith in a way this person might be able to relate to. And I think I might have managed to say something that struck a chord with her because she then said, 'I haven't got anything like that in my life.'

I wonder whether you can identify with my description of us? Are we people who believe that we are forgiven? Are we people who believe that we can break free from sin? Are we people who believe that God offers us life through his Son Jesus Christ? And are we people who believe these things because alleluia, Christ is risen?

I think that is who we are. And that makes us what St Augustine called an Easter people. People who are living new lives with the risen Christ.

And what do Easter people do on Easter day? We give thanks! We rejoice! We thank God that he sent us his son to set us free. Free to live new lives in Christ Jesus.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

