

EASTER SUNDAY – MINSTER

Reading: Acts 10 John 20¹⁻¹⁸

I. INTRODUCTION

The stone had been taken away – not to let the risen Jesus out but to let the disciples in

- in to see the grave clothes
- in to see that the body had gone
- in to begin to discover that Jesus is not here. He has risen.

The stories of the resurrection in the gospels show the different ways in which it took time for the disciples to grasp the truth that Jesus was risen. It took them much longer to really grasp the significance

- John hints at this with *“as yet they did not understand the Scripture”*

By the time Peter came to meet the Roman Gentile Cornelius some of this understanding is developing – although the event itself takes his understanding that the risen Jesus is for all people, in a deeper direction. He is very clear in his words that the risen Jesus is to be *‘Judge of the living and the dead’*

This becomes a consistent conclusion for the first Christians – the raising of Jesus from the dead confirms that he is Lord, Ruler, Caesar, King – and as such is the one who is to be the ultimate Judge of all people.

This being the case it must make us reflect on the implications of the resurrection for our understanding of Justice.

II. JUDGEMENT IS A REALITY THEREFORE **JUSTICE IS A REALITY**

There is a judgement to come for us all. There is a final judgement in which ultimate justice is to be done.

The death of Jesus was apparently an act of injustice – the innocent one dies, condemned as a blasphemer and sinner. His resurrection is his vindication; he should not have died and God determines that injustice and death will not triumph; the powers of darkness will be overcome by the light.

So justice matters in the eyes of God. This has been the constant witness of the Older Testament – the law insisted on justice for the poor; it sought justice for all through the Jubilee release of slaves and property; it mandated justice to be done

equally for poor and rich alike; the weak were to be defended not exploited.

Once Kings arrived they were called on to uphold God's justice. The constant plea and cry of prophet after prophet was that God's people uphold and maintain God's justice in the land. Judgement falls on Israel and Judah for their failure to uphold this justice – the weak were exploited rather than defended.

The resurrection of Jesus to be the judge of the living and the dead therefore highlights that this concern of God has not changed. Justice matters. Defending the poor and weak, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked remain a vital responsibility of God's people.

We are to be about seeking Justice as the resurrection people.

III. FORGIVENESS IS AVAILABLE

Yet Peter's message to Cornelius was also that the disciples were sent into the world with the message that through Jesus' death and resurrection God offers forgiveness to any and to all.

Judgement may create fear and anxiety – what if I don't match up? What if I fail? Actually more starkly – what hope is there for me, for us, for we know we don't match up, we know we fail. Well the message is clear – forgiveness is available.

Peter discovered this to be true for himself – his last memories of Jesus alive included his three denials of having anything at all to do with Jesus. No wonder he ran to the tomb – was their hope of forgiveness after all – well yes there was as he came to discover in the days that followed.

Mary Magdalene had seen her life transformed by Jesus the teacher, healer and deliverer – but with his death had all of this come to an end? Had it just been short term? No wonder she is distraught and confused at the time – no wonder she is overjoyed at meeting Jesus risen – she begins to understand this life change is permanent, lasting, for good. In Jesus she has found the one who brings forgiveness.

So in our pursuit of justice we also understand that God is in the business of forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration and renewal.

But this does not come about by lessening the offence, or by pretending nothing wrong had happened. This does not come about easily or cheaply – it costs God the death of his own son. Forgiveness is as costly as we can imagine. Reconciliation and restoration is hard work; it is painful.

Repentance – a recognition of not only the wrong deeds but the total wrong direction is required. A change of mind and heart; a change of attitude, direction and will is needed to effect this reconciliation; to receive this forgiveness.

Our justice systems – criminal, civil, ecclesiastical, local, need to be about restoration, reconciliation, renewal and change. But they need to be about these recognising the seriousness of offences and their consequences on victims. They need to be about the costliness of repentance and real transformation. They are not about ‘letting people off lightly’ though they are to be about rehabilitation and change.

Guilt binds us all – sinner and sinned against. We all need to find and experience God’s forgiveness, but in terms of justice none of us must ever think this is easy.

CONCLUSION

I love the Easter stories. The deeply personal nature of them. The individual nature of Jesus meeting Mary in the garden; Peter somewhere in Jerusalem and the two friends on the road to Emmaus.

I love too the corporate nature of them – the appearances in the Upper room and by the lakeside.

We need Easter to be a living personal experience for ourselves; we need it to be a living corporate experience as disciples gathered together. But we must never confine it here. The resurrection has huge implications for our whole lives – not least our Joining Together in the Transforming Mission of God expressed in Seeking Justice – including justice in our criminal and civil law systems for the risen Jesus is the one who will one day be the Judge of the living and the dead.