

## **SERMON: Easter Sunday – 17 April 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **Light shines from within**

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

John 20:1-18

Writing some 20 years or so after the resurrection of Jesus, Paul described that Easter event with the words,

“For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.”

That verse is often used at funeral services because it is the basis of the Christian hope beyond the grave. The empty tomb is the symbol that death is not the end.

The writer of *Spill The Beans* put it like this,

“Usually, on a good Spring day, we think of light shining from the outside, in through our windows and into our homes. The symbolism of Easter is that light shines from inside to the outside: from the empty cave and out into the world as the stone is rolled away revealing the empty tomb, letting the rays of what God has done for us disperse into the world and human life. The vision we cling to is that death, destruction, and darkness is defeated; light from God, and love, cannot be contained. Hallelujah, he is risen!”

Light shines from within. It's worth being reminded of that for we more often look for the light to come to us from outwith, and we all know that doesn't always happen. We often find ourselves in dark places or facing darkness, which is why its so crucially important to grasp this concept of the light streaming out from the inside, like the glorious light which flowed from the darkness of the tomb.

Does this mean that while the crucified and dead body of Jesus was placed in that dark tomb on the Friday that there was a light within which could never be extinguished even though he died?

I think the answer to that is yes. Or at least, we might wonder that there was a life power was triggered by death. Either way, it must be seen as what the NT calls eternal life. I am a new creation and that newness of life can begin anytime, any place, through faith in the Risen Christ.

It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. I have been crucified with Christ, Paul declares (Galatians 2:20).

And so this is the light which now emanates from within, the light and life and love of Christ, risen and now living within, leading us, inspiring us to acts of love.

I was reminded this week Jesus never said, "Worship me"; he said, "Follow me." He asks us to imitate him and that will mean facing the sort of things he faced, ridicule, mocking, beating, death.

But the call to follow me is not to dwell on the possibilities of the darkness but on the potential of the death defying light of God within.

Jesus told his followers that in order to follow they were to obey the two great commandments: (1) Love God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and (2) Love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:25–28).(remembering that in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37), Jesus shows us that our "neighbour" even includes our "enemy").

So perhaps the big question always is, So how do we love God?

Richard Rohr offered an answer to that question by saying, "Most of us seem to have concluded we love God by attending church services. For some reason, we think that makes God happy. I'm not sure why. Jesus never talked about attending services, although church can be a good container to start with. I believe our inability to recognise and love God in what is right in front of us has allowed us to separate religion from our actual lives. There is Sunday morning, and then there is real life. The only way I know how to teach anyone to love God, and how I myself seek to love God, is to love what God loves, which is everything and everyone, including you and including me!"

That sounds so simple doesn't it. Living out the Gospel is easy. I wonder why we find it hard sometimes.

There might be all sorts of reasons for that.

For Mary Magdalene meeting the Risen Jesus she wanted to hold onto him. And who could blame her.

Since the start of Covid, holding onto other people has become bit of a no no. And I'm sure there have been times when people just wanted to hug or place a hand on a shoulder to show sympathy or support. Because, especially in times of grief, it's hard not to touch. One feels the separation when we're not able to embrace or use touch. It's not easy to forego physical

contact in the hope that the other person can be held forever in our heart, something that's often said at funeral services.

Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

So, although Mary was warned off from touching, she was given a message to share, and we read on that,

Mary (Magdalene) went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

We might not tell others that we've seen the Risen Lord but in a sense that is the message we carry in our hearts, that Christ is Risen and therefore death is defeated, the grave is empty, that light is streaming out from within.

Christ is Risen

**He is Risen indeed!**

Alleluia!

Amen