

2021 Easter Day Reading Reflection and Prayers

Reflection from

Dean of Westminster Abbey The Very Rev'd Dr David Hoyle 2020

I grew up in a house where Easter could be a bit problematic. There were Easter eggs of course, but we were not churchgoers and I did not think to interrogate what lay behind the day or the egg. Then, in my teens, I started going to church and things got more complicated. My mother, as a young woman, had been devout. As she came to terms with my faith, she talked a little about hers. I learnt that, when her own mother died, before I was born and after a painful battle with cancer, my mother had lost her faith. My mother had seen her mother die. She knew her to be dead. She and I began a conversation about resurrection that loomed up each Easter and on other occasions too. My mother never could accept, that, in any sense her mother now lived.

My mother herself has died, and we found no resolution of her difficulty. As Easter dawns, I think of her again. I realise I did not tell her what she most needed to hear. I did not tell her that she was right. Death deals us a grievous blow. In the midst of the terrible crisis surrounding us now, so many families and friends are measuring their loss, feeling that devastating pain. Another Easter does not make it all better.

At Easter, Christians can sound as though they are telling us that Jesus died, but came back to life. It is the ultimate happy ending. Death is annulled, no longer a thing to be considered. It is just not true. In scripture, death is always a challenge; it is, Paul tells us, 'the last enemy'. Christ's resurrection does not annul death, or end our grief; the dead are still dead. We cannot set the truth aside in order to grasp at something easier to digest. To make sense of our lives and the world we need a history that does not play tricks on us.

In the midst of the crisis prompted by the coronavirus, more and more people are beginning to ask 'What difference will this make?' We wonder if we will learn lessons about the environment as we see air quality improve, or animals and plants reclaiming habitat. We wonder if our priorities will shift, our admiration of the NHS become more deeply embedded, our ability to identify and care for the vulnerable improve. We do not want to set this story aside as though it was an unfortunate intrusion into the real business of living. We want this to be the story. We want to remember those who died, remember

those who rescued us, remember those who cared. We want to make new judgements now about who we are and what we can do. We want to learn.

Easter does not set aside our past. The resurrection is not the magnificent last pitch of a fervent faith. It is not the pinnacle for real believers who knew that God never meant us to get hurt and just wants us to live happily ever after. The Resurrection is not even the last event, the last fact in the Good Friday Story. On Good Friday we see what happens when Herod, Caiaphas, Pilate or a crowd pass judgement. We see death, a real death. At Easter we see what happens when God passes judgement. Death is still death, but now there is a longer story to be told; the beginning and ending of which is not in our grasp. There is yet more to say and after defeat, there can be victory. The story is still true, it is just not over yet.

To that longer story, to that mystery, we commit ourselves when we say 'Christ is Risen'. We do that more in hope than certainty. We do it knowing the truth of loss but accepting we have much to learn. To that mystery, that longer story, I commit myself and my mother. Happy Easter.

Intercessions for Easter Day 4/4/21 written by Brian Simpson Reader

Jesus is risen, Love has won the victory. As we celebrate the risen Christ, let us pray to the God of life in whom we live.

May Christ's Easter rising enliven the Church that it may be filled with the love that takes even death in its stride; that we Christians together, in all our various ways and ministries, may work, strengthened by God, for the coming kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Oh Lord, the world has suffered long in sickness and despair. We thank you that the events of Easter Day show us that there is new hope, and we pray that the world may come to know the reality of that hope. May your love overcome

the fear, hatred, and distrust that mars the glory of your creation. We pray for all young people who suffer as a result of the enmities that exist between the powerful. Help us to play our part in bringing peace and healing to all around us.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Bless our communities with Easter joy. Take away the sense of loneliness that has darkened our common life recently. Help us to look with hope to new possibilities which touch the ordinary with beauty and gladness. We pray that our loved ones may safely enjoy the companionships that have so long been out of reach.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who are sick, sad, or lonely, especially those known and dear to us. Raise their spirits, oh Lord, and strengthen and uphold them in your risen life and love. In their physical, mental, or spiritual distress may they feel the stones rolled away and new light pouring into their lives.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

May all who have died to this earthly life find the light of God's eternity of joy and love.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

May we live each moment in thankfulness, knowing that God loves us.

Merciful Father **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**



Mary

And if you ask me what a Christian is
I'd say—not one who's pure in word and deed,
or goes to all the Sunday services,
or says their prayers, or knows the proper creed,

but that one who would gladly give away
all that they have now or have ever been
to stand between the dark tomb and the day
and know the moment of the Magdalene.