

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Easter was very late this year and it's slightly unusual to have the beginning of the Trinity term so soon after Easter Day. It is my favourite time of year, partly because Easter has fallen in the middle of spring when everything is bursting with colour and song and the sun seems to have returned from its winter exile. Or maybe it's the fact that Easter marks the end of a journey which began on Ash Wednesday when we were called to repent, to turn away from all that mars and deadens us and return to the source of life and love, our Lord. Or maybe it's the fact, in this Easter season, we as Christians simply rejoice with faces lit up by joy and hearts bursting with love for the new life revealed in our risen Lord.

As well as being my most favourite time of the year, Easter is also the season with which I intellectually grapple the most. Someone once told me that all you should do in Easter is proclaim that the Lord is risen and rejoice in the fact. Wise words, but my faith refuses to be that simple and always bellows out the question, why? Why do we rejoice at the resurrection of Jesus, what does it mean, did it really happen? Lying at the heart of these questions is, for me, a deep dis-ease.

On Good Friday we stood before the cross of Christ and pondered the extent to which God goes to show his love for us. In his pain and suffering, in his prayer of desolation, in his submitting to our sin, Christ reveals that Love himself is there in our darkest, cruellest selves, bringing healing and forgiveness.

The cross, before which we stood, has gone; the bare churches in which we prayed together are filled with the most beautiful flowers; the pain and suffering has been replaced by joy and delight. It is as if, for a moment, we had courageously named our fear, our pain, our vulnerability, our darkness, only to have someone say those most destructive of words, 'Cheer up, it will be all right, life goes on.' It is the way in which the resurrection seems to wave a magic wand over the cross, transforming the pain and suffering into joy and delight which puzzle me most profoundly. This morning in our readings we heard Peter's brave proclamation of the risen Christ and his evangelism as he converted 3000 people, and we heard the wonderful story of Jesus's appearance to the two disciples on the Emmaus road and his revelation of himself in the breaking of the bread. But I for one, I confess, all too often choose to live in, what seems to me, the reality of the cross rather than the wishful thinking of the resurrection.

One spiritual writer who has helped millions to go deeper into this mystery of the resurrection is the 14<sup>th</sup> century Julian of Norwich. In her work *The Revelation of Love*, Julian describes two crowns. One is the crown of thorns. In the first of her sixteen revelations or

visions, Julian see the moment in Christ's Passion when the crown of thorns is thrust upon his head. The emblem of power, sovereignty and honour has become one of mockery, humiliation and suffering. She describes the wounds it causes in very graphic and horrific terms, making us look and linger at what we would rather turn away from; the pain and suffering of a bleeding human body, the wounding and marring effects of sin.

The other crown is very different. It is more like what we expect a crown to be, a symbol of honour and glory which has been given to Christ as a reward for his saving work. But what this crown is made of, is rather remarkable. Julian says that this crown is not made of gold or adorned with precious jewels, neither is it a garland nor a wreath of victory but it is a crown made of us. She writes, 'we are his joy, we are his reward, we are his glory, we are his crown – and this was a special marvel and a thrilling vision, that we should be his crown'. Through Christ's atoning work on the cross we are saved, redeemed, brought back to God. We are the reward for Christ's suffering, we are his glory and we are his most beloved and precious jewels.

Two crowns: one of the Passion and one of the Resurrection. The wonder and the mystery Julian points to, is that these two crowns are not separate but are in fact one and the same. The crowns of thorns is the victorious garland of salvation, the instrument of torture is us in our pain and despair through sin, the symbol of humiliation is the power and sovereignty of God. In Christ on the cross we see the glory of God's love. In the risen Lord we see the wounds of sin and death. The cross and the resurrection are one.

This is the joy and wonder of Easter, that through Christ's love the instrument of death is the means of life, the wounds of sin are the means of grace and the dereliction of Christ is the prayer of salvation. So our joy and delight in this Easter season runs deep and can be every bit as deep as Peter's joy when he preaches to the first converts or the two disciples in Emmaus. This kind of joy does not skate over our sin and pain but plunges into the depth of our darkness and holds it with confidence to the life and love of God. It is in this light that we are able to hear and believe the words that Jesus said to Julian, 'The cause of all this pain is sin. But all shall be well and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well'.  
Amen.