

DEAD AND ALIVE

Sermon at the Eucharist on Easter Day

Collect & Readings: Book of Common Prayer

EASTER morning upturns all our ideas of what it means to be dead or alive. Jesus died: that is where the story of Easter begins; dead on the cross, taken down, wrapped in a shroud, laid in a tomb, with a boulder to block the way. The disciples are alive; those, like Peter, who had promised loudly to follow him to death had not done so; they all live on, wracked by guilt and grief. Yet as the story of Easter morning unfolds, we start to see it the other way round. It is the disciples who are dead, or hardly living: their hopes are dashed, their beloved master taken from them, all that they lived for has vanished. Well might they have said that their lives lay buried with Jesus in his tomb.

But what of Jesus, dead, shrouded, buried behind a boulder? Well, once Mary Magdalene and Peter and John have visited the tomb, and seen the boulder rolled away, and the shrouds set aside, and the tomb empty, then it dawns on them that he is alive. While the living disciples are dead in their despair and grief and guilt, the dead master is alive in glory.

Writing to the Colossians, St Paul plays with the same idea, and develops it. 'You have died', he says, 'and your life is hidden with Christ in God'. All your life, he says, is bound up with Jesus, and Jesus was buried in a tomb. But Jesus burst the tomb, and rose from the dead, and those who have bound their lives to Jesus find them lifted from the tomb to live with Jesus. 'If you have been raised with Christ' writes Paul, 'seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God'.

When the first disciples witnessed the death of Jesus, they knew their lives lay buried with him. But when they found the tomb empty, and when they met the risen Lord, then they felt their hearts and their hopes rise with him, and they knew that from that moment they would seek the place where Christ reigns in glory, and there set their hearts and their hopes.

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Preached at the Eucharist in Worcester Cathedral on Sunday 9 April 2023.

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BIDDINGS BEFORE THE PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

We pray for the Church: for this Diocese, for JOHN our Bishop, and MARTIN Bishop of *Dudley*; for the Deanery of ..., for ..., the Rural Dean, and ..., the Lay Chair of Synod;

In the wider Church, we pray for the Church/Province/Diocese of ...; for Archbishop ... and for the bishops, clergy and people of that province.

We pray for CHARLES our King, his Government, and for all Members of Parliament; for this County, City, and Borough of *Dudley* within this Diocese;

We pray for the sick; especially those commended by name to our prayers ... ;

And we pray for the departed; among those who have recently died for ... upon whom, as upon all souls of the departed, may Our Lord Jesus Christ have mercy.

So let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church, militant here in earth.