

DIOCESE OF NORTH EASTERN CARIBBEAN AND ARUBA

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BISHOP'S EASTER HOMILY 2024

My dear family in Christ,

No matter who we are, in this world there will be difficulties, disappointments, distresses, and even death. We may all face and may be affected by them in different ways. In our story of the resurrection, (Mark 16:1-9), we are provided with some encouragement in facing these experiences.

Mark opens the story with three devoted women visiting the tomb where Jesus was buried. Their intention was to anoint his body. There was no anticipation of the resurrection. They walked towards the tomb with the expectation of finding a dead, rather than a living Messiah. It was while approaching the burial place that it dawned on them that they will encounter difficulties. They began to debate the big challenge of rolling the huge stone away from the tomb. However, driven by their affection for Jesus, they weren't deterred. They didn't treat their difficulties as uncommon and insurmountable.

Fortunately, on their arrival at the burial place, their great problem was resolved. By God's intervention, the stone was rolled away. The message should have been pellucid that, even when we are oblivious to it, God is working for our benefit. The women were quite baffled by the removal of the stone from the tomb's entrance. When they entered the tomb, they encountered a messenger. Mark tells us that the messenger said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; He is not here. Look, there is the place they laid Him." (Mark 16:6). This notification about the resurrection of Jesus says a few things to us.

Firstly, the notification is meant to comfort, rather than confound us. So, the messenger says, "Do not be alarmed." Certainly, the women's surprise would have been justifiable. It is still not customary, that people return to life, after they are confirmed to have died. However, the women were not to treat it as fake news.

Through our God, things that are beyond our human imagination and effort can happen; things that, to us may appear impossible, can happen.

In his exposition on the messenger's notification, Halford E. Luccock writes, "It was incredible as good news, but it was good news that became credible. It was not too good to be true." Annually, we come to the great celebration of Easter and feel comforted, because news of life after death is not too good to be true. Death is a robber, a heart-breaker, and a separator, but it has been conquered by our Lord. This has opened up a blessed hope for all believers. It's also not too good to be true that our God has and still can bring His people through difficult circumstances. The resurrection of Jesus makes each of us an overcomer. Let us be comforted by news of the resurrection, because our God is able.

Secondly, the notification gives assurance that, by the death of Jesus, God's purpose has triumphed, not thwarted. The messenger says, "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised." The reference to the crucifixion is intentional. The perpetrators of the Good Friday incident meant it to be a tragedy. They struck down the man being acclaimed as Messiah and intended the destruction of His mission. They struck at the very purpose of God for the redemption of humankind.

It's no surprise that, for Jesus' followers, the crucifixion was a day of shattered hopes, and broken and frightened hearts. This is normal, because the death of Jesus seemed so final. However, the resurrection means that the story isn't over with the crucifixion. God has 'the final word' or 'the last laugh'. His purpose has triumphed.

The resurrection is confirmation of God's tenacity to save His world. The world is not what He meant it to be. It has strayed through selfishness and ungratefulness. It is endangered by cruelty and irresponsibility. It's suffering for lack of sincerity and true spirituality. Yet, it is "My Father's world." The resurrection is also our assurance that no difficulty is insurmountable. Let us not be distressed regardless how great the challenge and struggle. The huge stone was rolled away and the dead was raised. Our God can use struggles to sharpen and strengthen; and use adversities as blessings. Therefore, the crucifixion didn't thwart His purpose.

Thirdly, the notification was meant to create faith, not fear. He says, "He is not here. Look, there is the place they laid Him." He drew the women's attention to the empty tomb. It was empty, and they confirmed it by peering into the tomb. This

was the first convincing evidence of the resurrection. "No grave could keep His body down." The women were invited to observe for themselves that Jesus was miraculously raised from death. And from seeing the empty tomb, the expectation was that they would believe. It's an appropriate response to the resurrection.

The news by which God has transformed His world is not only that Jesus lovingly, obediently, and sacrificially died for sinners, but also that He physically and victoriously rose from death. We are called to have faith in God's Son, who conquered death and lives to die no more.

In John 20:29, faith in the risen Saviour is prioritized. "Jesus said to him (Thomas), 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" We are to dispel with all doubts, because the tomb was empty and there were eyewitnesses to the appearances of our risen Lord. Let us firmly put our faith and hope in Him. This is faith in our risen Saviour, who has invited us to cast all our cares on Him, because He cares for us. This is faith in our risen Saviour, in whom we have assurance that difficulties/troubles don't have to get us down. This is faith in our risen Saviour, in whom we are reminded that whatever problem we face in life, God is bigger than it.

When our faith and hope are set on God, we are assisted greatly in dealing with life's difficulties. Among other things, we develop a practical perspective. We will have a positive attitude in dealing with problems. They will be seen as opportunities for good outcomes; and means by which we may be shaped and strengthened by God; and things that will not last forever; and things which, by the grace of God, we will overcome. Let us not be discouraged in facing difficulties and troubles. We serve the God of the resurrection.

My family joins me to wish you a most holy and happy Easter. May the Lord gladden your heart and give you confidence in living for Him, as together we exclaim once more, "Alleluia! The Lord is risen indeed! Come let us adore Him. Alleluia!"

Your brother in Christ,



The Right Rev. Ernest A Flemming

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