

## Easter in the Lord's Resurrection 2018 St Marylebone 10.50 am Choral Eucharist

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

**He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!**

In recent weeks I have been rereading the works of E M Forster, not just because he was born in Marylebone, just off Dorset Square, but because I am off to Florence on Tuesday and with that in mind, I started my reading with *A Room with View* and am now continuing my way through his other novels and short stories.

A few days ago, in *A Passage to India*, I came across this sentence:

*"All invitations must proceed from heaven perhaps; perhaps it is futile for men to initiate their own unity, they do but widen the gulfs between them by the attempt."*<sup>i</sup>

For those of you who remember the book, the sentence relates to a rather painful so-called 'Bridge Party', a gathering arranged at the Club where 'acceptable' Indians could mix with the British on their well-manicured tennis lawns. Not inside the Clubhouse, of course – but least very close to it.

The garden party only serves to highlight the enormous gulf fixed by custom and fear between the British servants of the Raj and the peoples they governed.

Today, on Easter Day, a very different invitation offered: an invitation issued from heaven in the shape of an open door; an

invitation which highlights not difference or segregation but true and perfect unity; the bridging of all gulfs and divisions.

The first to respond to this invitation, early on the first day of the week, is Mary Magdalene. In the dark hours following the appalling events of Good Friday she finds herself being drawn towards the place of Christ's burial, close to the cross on which he had been humiliated, tortured and executed.

Mary comes to a place of death, darkness, decay and despair, but finds the stone, which had sealed Christ's tortured body, rolled away from the place of his entombment.

Others are drawn to this place as well: the women who came the morning after the Sabbath to anoint Jesus' dead and hastily buried body; Peter, who had, so publicly and humiliatingly denied Jesus three times in the courtyard of the High Priest's house where Jesus had been dragged as a prisoner, and John, the beloved disciple who had reclined close to Jesus at the Last Supper before his betrayal and arrest. All come to Calvary's necropolis but find not a barrier sealing the dead from the living, but an open door and a burial chamber empty save for a few grave clothes.

Throughout the pages of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, God issues invitation after invitation to his people to follow him; to enter into covenant relationship with him; to walk with him, talk with him; to be reconciled to him – but the invitations are either politely ignored or violently rejected - again and again and again.

Finally, the divine invitation is issued in the person of Jesus: God himself becomes incarnate, takes our flesh, is born of the Virgin Mary and lives a man among God's creation.

Jesus teaches and preaches, and heals and reconciles; Jesus lives a life of total obedience to his Father's design for creation but ends up betrayed and rejected, dragged ignominiously out of his own city and is done to death.

But God does not withdraw his invitation.

On Easter Day, the first day of a new creation, God invites everyone who is hungry or thirsty<sup>ii</sup>, everyone who labours or is heavy laden<sup>iii</sup> to visit an empty tomb and, with Mary Magdalene, the women who had gone to anoint Jesus' broken body; with Peter and John to discover that "another world is possible" – not the world of Good Friday but the world of Easter; not the world of violence and terrorism but a world of dialogue and peace; not the world of injustice and death but a world of human solidarity<sup>iv</sup> and new life; not the world of manmade division and segregation but a world of unity and reconciliation.

Easter transforms a terrible Friday into a Good Friday and proclaims throughout the universe that the cross is not the end; Easter transforms hostile screams of Crucify into joy-filled Alleluias; Easter births a new creation.

Those who respond to God's invitation, who are bold enough, like Darren and Lera this morning, to visit the empty tomb become themselves signs of this newness; become themselves God's open invitation to others to follow them.

So come with Darren and Lera, with Peter, Mary Magdalene and John; take up God's invitation to new life in God's new creation.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

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i *A Passage to India*, Forster, E. M., 1924

ii cf. Isaiah 53

iii cf. Matthew 11.28

iv Some ideas borrowed from Fr Antonio M. Pernia, SVD