Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Easter Day has dawned again – and what has changed? Everything, and nothing.

Some of us were up by 6.15 to greet the dawn in the Ruins – and we have the classic mixture of weariness and self-righteousness … but what has changed? Why are things still the same – wars, breakdowns of relationships, poverty, violence … what’s different?

I’ll tell you what’s changed. Nothing is certain any more. Who was it that said, “the two things that are certain in life are death and taxes?” It seems that one of those, at least, is no longer true. Doors that should stay closed aren’t locked any more. Stones that shouldn’t move have been rolled away. A dead man has not stayed dead: death is not what it was; the world is not what it was.

But it’s not at all straightforward. Mark’s gospel, more than any of the others, makes this abundantly clear: it ends in mid-sentence. Oh my God – the grave is empty! Abject terror, not a little bit of cosy joy, is the response of the women, understandably so. The angel, attempting to reassure, fails! This is not supposed to happen.

So, on this Easter morning we are, once again, confronted with uncertainty. We really don’t know what to make of this. ’Do not be alarmed?’ Why ever not? The Archbishop of Wales is reported today in the Daily Mail as casting doubt on the resurrection – perhaps because it can’t be understood.

The thing is, we know what to do with death. It is, in fact, a familiar part of life – and 2000 years ago, as today, they had rituals to follow to help negotiate the transitions that death means. As it happens, I spent much of yesterday wading through papers from my father, who died in September last year – it’s hard, but we know what needs to be done. There is a finality, even if we find it difficult to accept.

The truth is that hope can be harder to negotiate than disappointment. To hold open the possibility that the unchangeable might, actually, be changed can be exhausting, disorientating, distracting from the reality of life.

The resurrection is a summons to exploration – to searching without always finding; to questioning without always finding answers; to clinging to something only to find it has slipped from our grasp. The resurrection looks like … the truth is, we just don’t know. All we know, like the witnesses at the end of Mark’s gospel, is that truth looks like an empty tomb. What that means for each of us will be a little different. Truth looks more like uncertainty, than certainty – certainty that this, after all, is not the end, but uncertainty as to just what that may mean.

Keep on exploring. Keep on asking questions. Keep looking in the most unlikely places to discover the risen Christ. Never believe that you have him trapped in our buildings, our liturgy, our patterns of belief – these are places where he has chosen to make himself known to us – just as he made himself known to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, in the breaking of the bread. But he is not limited to these places. Leo Tolstoy tells a story of a man with a light fixed to a pole, and he calls people to him – it’s clear where he is, and where the light is, but once they have arrived, they are stuck, immobile: the light has not liberated them. He contrasts that with another man who picks up the pole and carries the light – it’s not always clear where he is, but once he has been found the light is liberating, because it’s on the move, and the people with it.

The resurrection is God’s light breaking into a sealed tomb, into a broken world: light has a way of getting in, or out, through the cracks. I met an architect after the Good Friday liturgy who described how Chapel of Christ the Servant (also known as the Chapel of Industry) contains an invitation to move towards the centre...
Be here, as we journey in towards the light ... through the transformation of light in this building ... we are invited to make a journey in our own lives, out of the dark certainties of death into the glorious but challenging uncertainty of life

...

What does truth look like? Truth looks like an empty tomb ... truth is not trapped, it is free, it is ahead of us ... indeed, nothing we ever say about God will ever be true .... Ruth Scott began her addresses this last Holy Week with a summons to orthopraxis – right living – as more significant in following Christ, than orthodoxy – right belief. We will never understand the resurrection:

_The resurrection is so big a truth that nothing we can say will ever touch it ... but we are, nonetheless, called to live it. So let’s clamber out of our tombs and follow the Risen Christ, in his story of life, and of love which cannot be conquered._

Yesterday ended, after I had finished writing this sermon, and after my father’s papers had been cleared away, as we sat down to watch the film of Les Miserables. It ends with Victor Hugo’s words, “To love another person is to see the face of God.” In the end, the resurrection is about God’s love, and the impossibility of that love ever being defeated, or ever coming to an end. That love seeks us out wherever we are, even in our sealed tombs, and sets us free. God’s love is stronger even than death, prises our prisons open so that we can truly live, with Jesus Christ our Risen Lord.

Christ is Risen, Alleluia. He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!