

11th May 2025 – Fourth Sunday of Easter (Year C)

In Spring many of the Sussex downland fields are filled with flocks of sheep and their new-born lambs. Cute as they are, sadly the ultimate destination of many of these creatures will be the abattoir - a thought most of us don't want to dwell on. Death, whether it is a lamb, or a human being is still a taboo subject – the preverbal elephant in the room.

Jesus throughout his equally short life and ministry regularly sought to address humanity's deep, deep fear of death. From the raising of his dear friend Lazarus to this morning's gospel account of his conversation with his disciples at the festival of the Dedication Jesus regularly proclaimed the future hope of resurrection. And new life. In John 10 Jesus spoke as if he were the shepherd and his disciples the sheep, when he said: "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish" (John 10:27). A familiar passage in which once again reminds us that sheep respond to his voice they recognise – the shepherd. I wonder whose voice you hear. Is it the voice of God in Christ speaking the truth about eternal life or is it that little voice in your head the voice of the liar that says death is something to be feared?

On Easter Day we journeyed with those first disciples of Jesus as they arrived at the dark tomb where Jesus lay only to find it empty. However, they first had to enter the darkness to see and experience for themselves, the 'light' that lay within and beyond. That is the light of the risen Christ - the light of the world. The light of revelation that quenches and dispels the darkness - that is humankind's innate fear of death.

The 13th Century Persian poet Rumi once wrote: 'The cave you fear to enter may hold the light you seek'. Sometimes we need to first enter the metaphorical 'dark cave' to discover the light that lies within. That 'dark cave' frequently comes in the form of pain, suffering or bereavement.

Many question, how can a God of love allow suffering and why did God allow Jesus to suffer and die prematurely aged only 33. This was probably the same question that the friends and family of Dorcus asked in our New Testament reading from the Acts of the Apostles. 'A woman devoted to good works and acts of charity'. (9:36). Yet, she was taken ill and died soon after, leaving her friends distraught with grief. It was the Apostle Peter who knelt, prayed, and raised Dorcus back to life. Why did this miracle happen - to demonstrate the power of the resurrection. That the power of death has been overcome. This is in essence the gospel or good news message that Jesus brought. The consequence of this miracle was that "many in Joppa believed in the Lord" (Acts 9:42). It was a force multiplier.

Today's reading from Revelation 7 we are given a glimpse of what lies within the apparent dark 'cave' - a future that awaits all who are in Christ. It's a pastoral theme of heaven with Jesus as both lamb and shepherd on a throne reigning in eternal glory and we his sheep gathered around him. We read:

'They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

So do not be afraid of entering the cave no matter how dark; it may well hold the very light that you seek. Let us remember that each time we participate in Holy Communion, we recall Christ's suffering - we celebrate with symbols of his death. Yet, we leave transformed by joy in the glorious light and hope of resurrection. Our hearts no longer anxious but filled with his abiding peace.

Fr Andy Jacobson