

EASTER I or SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year A

Responsibility: Canon Barlow

[Based on the Gospel for the day viz. John 20:19-31]

"Jesus said to Thomas: Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (Jn.20:29)

Because of Thomas' slowness and unwillingness to believe the good news of the Resurrection, he has been known from that time as Thomas the Doubter. It's a bit unfair, like so many labels we put on people, because, after all, the other disciples themselves had come to full belief only because they had had the experience of seeing the Risen Christ, which Thomas had missed out on.

It is a pleasant thing to be the bearer of good news, to be able to tell somebody that something fortunate has happened, or to reassure someone in distress or anxiety that their troubles are over, and to see their face light up with joy and happiness because of what we have been able to tell them. Only one thing can spoil the pleasure of telling good news, and that is when the person to whom we give it does not respond as gladly as we expected. The commonest reason is that they already know and have already got over their excitement. Or the person might not believe what we say. Or occasionally you strike one of those gloomy people who seem to prefer to hear bad news rather than good.

Thomas' reaction to the exciting news of the Resurrection of Jesus must have been like a bucket of cold water to those who so joyfully told him! Why he reacted this way, we do not know. Perhaps it was too much for him to accept, after the trauma and tragedy of Good Friday. Perhaps he thought they were mistaken about what they claimed to have seen. I doubt that he thought they were deceiving him or pulling his leg - that would have been a pretty poor joke. But probably they would have been a bit annoyed with him for his cool reception of their joyful news.

Whatever sharp words might have been said, and whatever strained feelings there were, the other disciples remained patient with Thomas, and he with them, for when the disciples met on the following Sunday, Thomas was with them, joining in the worship and in the talk about the incredible happenings of the previous Sunday. Again Jesus came, and this time because he was present and saw Jesus with his own eyes, Thomas was satisfied and believed. The patience the rest of the group had shown towards Thomas, and he towards them, had been rewarded.

Here is a direct rebuke to those of us who become impatient with others in the congregation who are so slow to see things our way; so slow to believe as fully and devoutly as we do; so slow to give and work for the Church as we do. We must **learn to accept such reluctance and** wait patiently for full conversion to dawn. It is not easy, but think how frustrated the other disciples must have been because Thomas just could not share in the fulness of joyful believing.

The role of the Apostles was that they were to be the foundation of the Church. There were many more followers of Jesus than just this small handful, of course - St. Paul in detailing some of the

post-Resurrection appearances mentions Jesus appearing to 500 disciples on one occasion (1 Cor.15:6). But the Apostles were the leaders because they were witnesses to all that Jesus had said and done. When it was thought desirable to fill the gap in the ranks of the Apostles, left by Judas Iscariot, the conditions necessary to be chosen as one of the inner group were stated by Peter: "One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of the resurrection." (Acts 1:21,22)

The writing of St. John's Gospel, which recounts the incident of Thomas and his disbelief, is thought to have been towards the end of the first **century**, when most of the Apostles were dead. In telling the story no doubt John wished to reassure the Christians of the second and third generations that their faith was as valid as those who had **been** physically present. Their faith was of necessity based on the witness of those who actually saw, heard, and touched the Risen Jesus. He also wished to assure them that their faith was in no way inferior to that of the first disciples. It was the same faith, though based on different signs and witnesses. They could be sure that in receiving the apostolic witness transmitted within the Church, they were in living contact with the Risen Lord. And this is why in **the** Creed we declare our belief in the "apostolic Church" - that is, the Church holding to the faith taught by the Apostles. This too is the basis of the Apostolic Succession to which the Anglican Church, with others, holds close. Not only do we look to Holy Scripture for the record of the story of mankind's redemption, but we have the living, unbroken chain of reassurance transmitted down the ages. No priest is ordained except by a bishop, who was himself first ordained a priest and later consecrated a bishop by at least three other bishops, themselves having been properly ordained and consecrated, and so on, back to the very first witnesses of the Resurrection. That does not mean that errors or mistakes of teaching and belief do not creep in.- history records many terrible happenings taking place from time to time, and the worst of sins have been done in the name of the Church. But in God's providence these are corrected in due time as faithful men and women hear the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Today's Gospel reminds us that our faith originates in Jesus' resurrection, which was witnessed by the first disciples and transmitted to succeeding generations. We have not seen the Risen Jesus as those first disciples did, and yet we know that He has risen because we accept the apostolic witness, and have our Lord's assurance that we are blessed in so doing: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

"Seeing is believing" people unthinkingly say. The first disciples believed because they physically saw Jesus. We do not see Jesus in that same way - and yet there is a sense in which we must see Him if we are to believe. In hearing or reading the testimony of the Apostles we do not simply accept their words blindly: we know them to be true; we see them as true. We meet the Risen Jesus today as really as the first disciples, only, the conditions are different. For them the signs were His actual appearances. For us the signs are the Church and the Sacraments ministered by His Apostolic Church. We become aware of Christ's nearness and can "tap into" His strength and power as we open ourselves to the influence of the Holy Spirit. We reach beyond the outward and

visible signs to the reality of Christ Himself, and by this contact with Him, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, become like the first Apostles, His witnesses to the world.

AMEN

"Because I live, you also will live." (John 14:19)

"Jesus lives!" This is the glorious, triumphant message of Easter Day. Had the story of Jesus Christ come to an end on Good Friday, how very much poorer the world would be. Take from the Creed the words: "On the third day He rose again", and its power is gone.

Our Lord's Passion, His death, and His resurrection are facts of history. But they are more than that. If your observance of Easter is merely the commemoration of an historical event of nearly 2000 years ago, then, no matter how wonderful that event was, you are badly missing the mark, because there is much more to it than that. Our Lord's whole life and ministry were a demonstration - a demonstration of God's love, God's power, God's purpose. The Cross demonstrates, as no theory or instruction could ever do, the shamefulness of sin and the greatness of God's love. But if the story stopped there, how would we know that God's love had defeated the power of sin, and death? The Resurrection demonstrates, as no other theory or instruction could ever do, the power and the purpose of God. Jesus Christ paid the price of sin on a cross outside Jerusalem - the empty tomb is God's receipt to the paid-up bill.

But there is much more to it even than that! Take away the fact of the Resurrection, and the whole history of Christianity becomes impossible to explain. Somewhere between the Crucifixion and the first preaching of the Apostles, something happened that completely changed the character of those men. Something so tremendous and so vital that it not only changed their characters but gave them the power to change the history of the world! Nothing less than that!

The power came from God, and God works through human agents, and because Peter and John and the rest allowed God to work through them and to use them, the history of the world was changed.

The evidence for the Resurrection is not just that which we read in Holy Scripture: it is also in the subsequent history of the Church . Look at the new lives of the disciples - they became different men! In the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested, they were a disorganised, cowardly rabble, and they reassembled later in their upper room with the door locked for fear. Yet a few weeks later we find these same men rejoicing to endure hardship and ready to face death, rather than keep silence about the rising to life of Christ. Why should they stand by such a story about one whom they had seen die the shameful death of a common criminal and whose body they had placed in a tomb? The centurion had vouched to the Roman Governor that He was dead. The tomb had been sealed and a guard placed over it. Why proclaim such a statement about resurrection, when it would only get them into trouble? Why be beaten and put in prison for saying something that no-one was likely to believe?

But it was not long before this strange doctrine found its way into the official, certainly non-Christian records of the day. This seeming nonsense about one Jesus having risen from the dead

grew to such proportions that it attracted the attention of Imperial Rome itself. There was growing up round this extraordinary statement, not just an association or party, but a live body of men and women whose whole way of life was vitally changed. So changed as to threaten the very foundations of the Roman Empire.

There is only one possible explanation. The disciples knew that Jesus HAD risen from the dead. They knew beyond any shadow of doubt because they had seen Him, talked to Him, touched Him, eaten with Him.

There are many people today who would call this nonsense, and fanciful, and declare it to be merely legend and wishful thinking. There are many who dodge the issue entirely and avoid thinking about it. There are many who would ask "What has this got to do with me?" But no-one can deny that the history of the world WAS changed.

Was it changed by the hysterical imagination of a few women and a handful of assorted Galilean peasants? Did these few people sit down and deliberately organize a fraud: a hoax good enough to withstand the investigation of the Jewish priestly party, which was the most powerful and influential in Palestine, and the investigation of the government of Imperial Rome with its elaborate spy system - a fraud that earned them nothing but floggings, imprisonment, and death? Does that make sense? Could anyone really imagine that if the last that was seen of Jesus was when loving hands laid His tortured body in a tomb, that today hundreds of thousands of people the world over would be gathering together to sing His praise? Does that make sense?

There is only one fact that can explain all this: the fact which the Church declares over and over and over again - "On the third day He rose again". But this miracle of the Resurrection is not only something that happened a long time ago, wonderful to contemplate but of no vital consequence to us today. Jesus lives! The glory and the power of the Resurrection lie in those two words. Jesus Christ is as much alive today as He was on that first Easter morning, and that is of very real consequence to you and to me, because of His promise: "Because I live, you shall live also."

We are not called into the service of Someone who lived and died in Palestine centuries ago, but into the service of Jesus who now lives, and who is willing and ready and waiting to share the glory and the power of Eternal Life - not in the sweet bye and bye, but here and now.

So what are we going to do about it? Are we, who like to call ourselves Christians, really serving the purpose for which Christ founded His Church? To the apostles the Resurrection meant that they could never take life easy again. To them the Resurrection was so vital that they could never again be complacent, self-satisfied, smug. They not only had a new way of life to live, but a new message to proclaim.

And was there ever a greater need than now for men and women to know that Jesus lives? To know that His power is available for all the problems and perplexities that beset us? And how is

the world to know these things if you and I fail to proclaim them, both by our manner of living and by the word spoken as occasion presents itself?

A little ill-assorted company of men and women in Palestine once changed the course of the world. Life today may be more complex than then: but there are no greater forces against us than there were against them. We have far superior resources; our numbers are far greater. If we who call ourselves Christians would allow God to use us, we too could change the history of the world.

The message of Easter is above all a message of triumph. The Church keeps many holy days commemorating many vital truths. But today, Easter Day, is our triumphant Holy Day, the day which tells of victory and power. Jesus lives. And Jesus said: "Because I live, you shall live also."

AMEN

You and I who are trying to live and worship and act as Christian men and women, are often plagued by doubts and questions about the claims and authenticity of Jesus. Few people, if indeed any can escape such thoughts.

Some of the most important questions which Christians have to face were asked on the first Good Friday by one of the principle people involved - Pontius Pilate. His first question might have been put with scornful amusement: "**Are** you the king of the Jews?" After all, this was probably the first time Pilate had met Jesus, though no doubt the Roman spy system had a dossier on Him. "Are you the king of the Jews - you, a mere Galilean carpenter!" Jesus replied: "My kingdom is not of this worldEveryone that is of the truth hears my voice." This statement seems to have made Pilate realize that Christ's power was of an utterly different character from that usually associated with kingship. And he seized on the word "truth". "What is truth?" he asked, in the manner of a person sceptical of the claims which religious and political propagandists make. He didn't wait for a reply it seems.

But instinctively aware of the integrity and innocence of Jesus, Pilate addressed his next question to the mob: "Which will you have set free, Jesus or Barabbas?" Surely their common sense would lead them to prefer the guiltless Nazarene to the convicted bandit and murderer! But no, they chose Barabbas.

Then Pilate floundered. Instead of using his authority to make the decision himself, he asked: "What shall I do with Jesus?" The response was: "Crucify him!" He tried again to make the mob face facts, saying: "What evil has he done?" The answer was an even louder shout for the death penalty. Pilate gave in. In a feeble attempt to clear himself of blame, he washed his hands of the whole affair, literally, in public.

The terrible day was drawing to a close when Pilate asked his last question. The friends of Jesus had come seeking the governor's permission to remove and bury the body of their Lord. St. Mark's Gospel records that Pilate asked if the Nazarene had indeed died, and required certification from the centurion in charge of the execution. "Is he already dead?" He wanted to make sure that the whole affair was over. In fact it had only just begun.

Throughout the centuries Pontius Pilate has been condemned for his cowardice and his readiness to let self-interest override his plain duty to release an obviously innocent man. But if we try to put ourselves in his place, we might understand how his problem was really one which faces most of us in our own life situations. His questions reflect those which arise in the minds of people in every age including our own.

The kingship of Jesus, for example, is crucial for Christianity. We have to ask ourselves if we believe and behave as though Jesus is the Lord of all life, risen and existing today. Or do we give lip-service to this doctrine while in fact we act as though Jesus is only a glorious, impossible example, and His teaching an outdated idealism? Again, if His power is not of this world, we have to ask if the Church ought to be concerned about its prestige and social and political power.

Jesus said that everyone that is of the truth hears and obeys His voice. And Pilate asked what truth is. Like Pilate we tend to be sceptical about claims made as to truth, subjected as we are to the constant blast of advertising and propaganda. We are tempted to conclude that there is no such thing as truth, no standard by which such claims can be verified. Our greatest trust is given to what we call "scientific evidence", which demands practical evidence and distrusts faith. Yet we might question whether this kind of approach gives the whole truth about life. Pilate did not recognise that the real truth about the meaning and purpose of life stood before him - not as a set of abstract ideas, but as a way of life embodied in the person of Jesus.

Pilate appealed to the crowd. They chose Barabbas. This was not the first or the last time in history that the mob preferred evil to good, when it has been made to feel insecure by stirrers appealing to the emotions under the guise of appealing to reason. Truth and justice are swept aside. And the situation can rarely be saved - except sometimes by a minority who dare to be different, and then at times even they are swept aside. We have to ask ourselves what witness we would be prepared to give in a situation where we honestly believed the majority opinion to be wrong on some vitally important issue of morals or political or social action - or if we would take refuge in silence. Some of our politicians are right now called to publicly state their support or opposition to the question of legalising euthanasia. It is one thing to mumble protests to our friends - it is another to actually stand up and be counted. It is easy for us to despise the crowd who condemned Jesus, and He Himself didn't.

He was "moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep without a shepherd."

Pilate's final question is the most important one: for the Church today, for the world at large, for ourselves as individuals. "Is He dead?" At that point of time, yes, Jesus was dead. The centurion certified to Pilate that He was dead, and a Roman soldier would know a dead man when he saw one. So He was buried by His sorrowing friends. But it was not the end.

St. Paul wrote: "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." Paul knew from his own experience and that of the apostles and the other disciples, that the most convincing proof of the Resurrection was not the empty tomb or the vision of angels or even the appearance in the locked room - but the transformed lives of those who had experienced the Risen Lord. It is still so today. The Church is and must always be the Church of the Resurrection, to give to the world the true answers to the ultimate questions about death, and about life. And we who profess and claim to be followers of Christ must show by the quality and faithfulness of our lives that we do indeed walk in the light of the full knowledge of the Risen Jesus, whose death we commemorate today and whose resurrection we will celebrate on Sunday.

AMEN

[Based on the Gospel for today viz. John 9:1-41]

Again today we have placed before us a very long reading for the Gospel Lesson. Last Sunday you remember it was the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well of Joseph, with the wordplay about water - ordinary well-water which only quenches thirst temporarily, and the living water from Christ welling up to eternal life. Today's double-play is on "sight": the physical lack of sight which Jesus healed, and the spiritual lack of sight of the Pharisees.

Until comparatively recent times, illness or disability was thought to have been God's punishment for sin. But when a man has been blind from birth - whose was the sin? Hardly an unborn child; perhaps his parents! Now this does happen, unfortunately, in our own society. The faults, and not necessarily sins, of fathers and/or mothers who have for instance been alcoholics, drug-takers, smokers, or have contracted some form of venereal disease or AIDS, do cause disabilities in their children. In the case under discussion though, Jesus makes it quite clear that neither the man nor his parents had sinned. His reply to the disciples when they raised the question might suggest that the poor fellow was born blind precisely in order that the work of God might be made manifest in him. No explanation or reasoning about the causes of undeserved suffering is helpful or brings relief to the person afflicted, and Jesus doesn't even attempt an explanation. What He does do is proceed to do God's work upon the sufferer and his suffering.

So Jesus spat on the ground and made clay to put on the man's eyes. We might wonder why, when for other healings He simply touched the sufferer, and in some cases, healed from a distance without even seeing the person afflicted. We don't know, we're not told why Jesus acted in certain ways with certain people - we can only speculate.

In healing a person, Jesus was more concerned, generally, with the re-creation of the whole person, rather than merely with the healing of some specific ailment. It may well be in this case that Jesus was concerned to remind the man, and his family, and the onlookers, that according to the Book Genesis: "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, clay, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." (2:7) St.Paul wrote: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation". (2 Cor.5:17) And the man was sent off to wash in the pool of Siloam. [Si-lo-am] "So he went and washed and came back seeing." (v.7) Obedience, and faith, and baptism. There was a change in the man. Some asked: "Is this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said: "It is he." Others said: "No, but he is like him." He said: "I am the man." The new creation of a man remade by Christ. But he still did not know who Jesus was: "The man called Jesus did it."

A little later he was taken to the Pharisees - the leaders and rulers of God's people. This healing had taken place on the Sabbath and some interrogation of the healed man was necessary. The argument was that Jesus could not be of God because He did not keep the Sabbath. Yet others asked: "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" The problem was not as straight-forward as we might suppose, because in the Book Deuteronomy the Law states: "If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says: 'Let us follow other gods and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or, dreamer. That prophet

or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God." (Deut.13:1 ff.) And clearly, to them, one who did not keep God's Sabbath could not be of God.

So they asked the healed man: "What do you say about him?" He replied: "He is a prophet." Notice the growing insight of the man. Later he said: "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." The authorities could not forget that Jesus had broken the Sabbath and therefore was a sinner. The once-blind man could not forget that he had been healed by Jesus who therefore was at least a prophet. "Whether he is a sinner I do not know: one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."

The authorities, unlike the healed man who drew nearer and nearer to Jesus, found themselves being driven further and further away from Jesus: they were still blind, still would not see. "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered: "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples?" A bit cheeky, that, and not surprisingly the authorities became very indignant, and exclaimed: "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses."

The choice confronting the Pharisees was by then clearly between the old Moses through whom came the Law, and the new Moses - Jesus - through whom comes grace and truth. "We know that God has spoken to Moses," they said, 'but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.'" They must have known that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, but they did not suspect His divine origin. They could not accept the once-blind man saying: "If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." So they excommunicated him.

Hearing of this, Jesus went looking for him, and revealed Himself to him as the Messiah, and the great miracle within a miracle occurred. Just as last week we heard Jesus say to the woman at the well of Joseph: "I who speak to you am he", so today we hear Jesus say to the man whose sight He had restored: "You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you." The man said: "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped Him. The bestowal of physical sight by Jesus enabled a man who had only just begun to see, to look at the man Jesus and see there the heavenly Son of man. Insight had been given with sight - the miracle was complete.

In the final rounding-off of the incident, Jesus sets upon the Pharisees of His own day and upon us in our own generation, the warning of condemnation for those who profess to see and know, but who do not believe. Jesus makes it plain that "seeing" in the sense of "believing", or being blind in the sense of not believing, is a fully voluntary and responsible act of human decision. "If you were blind, you would have no guilt" - that is to say, "if your inability to confess me as Christ were an affliction like physical blindness, there could be no possible blame attaching to your unbelief. But that is not the case when a person professes to see and to know, or has every opportunity to see and to know, and will not wholeheartedly turn to Christ. In that case, the blindness is not an affliction for which a person cannot be blamed, but is an act of refusal for which responsibility must be accepted

The exhortation in today's Epistle sums it all up: "Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord: walk as children of light." (Eph.5:8)

AMEN

"Jesus said to Martha: I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25 &26) Each of the three readings appointed for today has the **common** theme of resurrection.

In the Old Testament reading we hear Ezekiel reassuring the people who were in captivity in Babylon that their freedom was coming. It would be like rising from death to new life. Ezekiel had denounced the sins of the people who had brought about the exile by their desertion of God and His laws. He foretold that greater misfortunes were still to come; that Jerusalem and its Temple would be destroyed by the Babylonians and even more people would be taken into captivity. It would be the death of the nation Israel.

However the prophet also foretold that better days were to come, for God would take back His people again, and place them in their own land once more. Resurrection!

Nothing much changes with respect to the attitude of men and women towards God. Like the Israelites we too at times turn away from God, and we suffer the consequences of being cut off from Him. Fortunately for us God is merciful and forgiving, and if we do offend Him, we can always start a new life with Him by sincerely repenting our past mistakes. When we do this, and turn back to God, we can look forward to a better, renewed, life.

To illustrate his message to the Israelites, Ezekiel told them his vision of **the valley of dry bones coming** to life as God breathes upon them. "Breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude." (37:10) The exiled Israelites are the dry bones - "bones that were very dry" - and now the people are to be raised up and given new life. They are not to despair because all is not lost - God will free them from captivity. Despite their neglect of God, they still remain His chosen people.

The message is there for us too. We are inclined to despair and drop our bundles when we see the Church like the valley of dry bones - not very faithful to our Lord's commands; not filled with much zeal; not "getting anywhere". We're at times inclined to despair at our own slow spiritual progress. But God does not let His people go. They might turn their backs on Him and they will suffer accordingly, self-inflicted suffering. God still cares about His people, and all it takes is repentance and a sincere desire for a new start for that new life in Christ to begin.

And that is what St. Paul is saying in the second reading, an extract from his letter to the Christians in Rome. Through their union with Jesus Christ, believers are given new life by the Holy Spirit. According to St. Paul, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if you are striving to live a Christian life, wanting to be a true Christian, then the Spirit of Christ is in you. This means taking each day as it comes; offering to God its joys and its sorrows, its happy times and its troubled times. It means living in peace with God and with your neighbour. This of course is not a11 that easy to do, and we may be comforted by a

verse further on in this letter to the Romans, which says: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (12:18). It requires great effort at times, but again, from today's reading, there is the reassurance: "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit that dwells in you." (v.11) Paul is speaking merely of physical life, but more importantly, spiritual life: He will give spiritual life to your mortal bodies. We are spiritual beings inhabiting mortal bodies. Our mortal, physical bodies die; our spirits, our souls, are destined for eternal life in that existence we call heaven.

So we come to the Raising of Lazarus. In St. John's Gospel it is the last of the seven miracles recorded by John and which are called by him "signs", which point to the divinity of Jesus. That divinity is perfectly revealed in this incident, for it shows not only His awe-inspiring power over death, but also His caring nature as He ministered to Martha and Mary in their grief.

Twice before Jesus had demonstrated His power to restore life: the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Nain. In those cases our Lord's enemies might have claimed that they were simply states of coma. But Lazarus had been dead for four days, and the physical evidence of death, putrefaction, had set in. There is significance in that fourth day, for in Jewish tradition a person's spirit hovered in the vicinity of the tomb until the third day, when it finally went away. We are to be quite assured that Lazarus was dead. St. Paul calls death the last enemy to be overcome, and explains that "as by a man came death" - referring to the result of the disobedience of Adam - "by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor,15:21,22) It was the defeat of death which was the final evidence of Jesus' divinity and power. He alone can cause the transformation from corruption into incorruption, mortality into immortality. And here too we see the first indication of His own coming, decisive victory over sin, death, and the grave.

Martha believed in life after death. It was not an uncommon belief among Jews at that time. When she heard that Jesus was coming she went out to meet Him and even reprimanded Him for not coming sooner: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." And Jesus replied, in effect,: "Martha, why all the fuss? Your brother will rise again." Martha responded: "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus affirmed her belief in the first part of His answer: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." What an astounding thing to say! But notice the order here: whoever lives in me, and whoever believes in me. In our living in Him, that is, in our following however stumblingly, we come to believe in Him. In our following, Jesus reveals Himself to be the Messiah. It was in following Jesus that the first disciples discovered Him to be the Christ. And it is the same with us - only as we follow do we discover Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus was taking the issue of resurrection on from a discussion of life after death to the idea of resurrection in this life. It was not His purpose - to provide us with a Traveller's Guide to the Hereafter. In fact Jesus warned against undue speculation about the hereafter. The best theology about the future is very simple: "If I can trust God for the here and now of this life, I can trust Him for the hereafter."

For Jesus' preoccupation was not with "life after death", but with "life after birth". He was far more concerned about eyes that look without seeing, and ears that hear and yet are deaf. About the atrophied mind, the dulled imagination, the calloused heart.

"Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." The hope of our resurrection in the life of the world to come is based on the fact that God can raise us to new life here and now. The traditional Easter Anthem says: "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin: but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

By living in Christ now, and believing in Christ now, and leaving the old self-centered way of life behind, we experience resurrection now. Dry bones brought to life; spirits alive through righteousness; trusting in God in this life and in the life of the world to come.

AMEN

PALM SUNDAY, Year A Responsibility: Canon Barlow

I do not preach a sermon on Palm Sunday. Instead I read the account of our Lord's Passion from the appropriate Gospel, viz. this year St. Matthew chapters 26:14 to 27:6b. I find this very effective if read carefully and distinctly - and certainly more effective than anything I could write for the occasion.

In place of the appointed Gospel, which is very long and too long for people to stand through, I read the story of the Triumphal Entry, which otherwise is not heard on Palm Sunday. This year Matthew 21:1-11.