



**GRAY'S
INN**

Easter Sermon 2020

Owing to the closure of the Chapel due to the CoronaVirus, this sermon was delivered as part of an Audio Service made available on the Inn's website

Do not be afraid

Lesson: Matthew chapter 28, verses 1-10

The four Gospels record the resurrection of Jesus in different ways. All four begin with the visit of the women to the tomb in the early hours of the morning, and Mark just leaves it there: the original ending of his Gospel was probably “they fled in terror and amazement... for they were afraid”. John tells of the disciples gathering in the Upper Room, in fear for what was happening to them, when Jesus appears and says “Peace be with you”. Matthew, as we just heard, also talks of fear: as they leave the garden “with fear and great joy” they meet the Risen Christ who says to them “Do not be afraid”.

We are living through a time when many people are living in fear, fear of an invisible enemy – the Virus – which could catch up with any one of us, and especially those who are more vulnerable, whose health is weak, or who live in places which lack our kind of health services. As with those first disciples in the Upper Room, it's a fear of the unknown, of forces beyond our control.

Think for a moment about these people, now reduced to eleven with Judas gone, and the women who had accompanied them. The men were mainly Galilean fishermen and peasants, who had come to Jerusalem and been caught up in the feuds between their religious leaders, the puppet King Herod, and the Roman authorities. In better times following Jesus has been a great adventure, but this last week has seen betrayal, denial and desertion. They are afraid for their lives, but also afraid of what they've become.

And the Risen Christ says to them, “Peace be with you”, “Do not be afraid”. It's very important to say that this is not easy magic. Easter Sunday does not undo Good Friday. The suffering and the struggle do not go away. But what Easter does do is to set it in a different perspective. Suffering can redeem as well as destroy. Service and sacrifice will be vindicated. The God who suffers with us and for us will pull us through, in this life, and in the life hereafter.

My hope and my prayer is that when this present crisis is over we too will see life in a different way. We will find our faith deepened rather than stretched. We will look again at how we organise our life in this country, and around the world, re-examine our priorities, ask what it means to share a common life in society, and on this fragile planet.

That of course might cause a new kind of fear. Are we prepared to do all that? In the years that followed the disciples had to face all kinds of challenge and sometimes failure. But as Jesus said at the end of this same chapter in Matthew: “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.