

*Link to Service for Easter Day <https://youtu.be/zD0SecqliiM>*

This is an Easter Day like no other that we have experienced. Normally on Easter morning a large crowd gathers at the summit car park in Howth for the Ecumenical Sun Rise Service followed by breakfast in one of our Church centres. Our Churches would have been full as we gather to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. Then we would have headed off to meet with family and friends. Instead this morning the Summit Car Park is cordoned off, our Churches are empty and we are confined to our homes. We are in lockdown and likely to remain so for a few weeks yet.

But then, I thought, the disciples were in lockdown on that first Easter morning. Frightened for their own safety, they have hidden away, some planning to get out of Jerusalem, heading for Emmaus. As we read in our Gospel reading, Mary Magdalene sneaks out before day break to visit the tomb where the broken body of Jesus had been hastily placed the previous Friday night – only to find it empty. At this point the empty tomb is not a source of joy but of further despair. She goes to tell the disciples – but all they see is an empty tomb and they return to their hiding place further confused. Mary's despair is only transformed into joy in her encounter with the risen Jesus as he speaks her name.

Let us fast forward to the evening of that first Easter Day. We read in John's Gospel:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with

you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

*John 20:19ff*

They were glad when they saw the Lord.

The despair of the empty tomb, now replaced by the joy of encounter with their living Lord. He speaks words of peace. But not an empty peace. He shows them his hands and his side. Marks of suffering, marks of a battle fought, now displayed as signs of a victory won. He comes to them in his risen power. And a group of broken and despairing followers, haunted by memories of his suffering and their failure, are transformed and empowered to go back out into the world they have fled from to spread a Gospel; a Gospel that, in a few short years, will reach into the very heart of Rome itself.

In our separation from each other this Easter Day, the risen Jesus stands among us. He shows us his hands and his side and gives us his peace and calls us to share that peace with friends and family. He comes into situations of division; having reconciled us to God, he calls us to be agents of healing and reconciliation. He comes into situations of fear, to those anxious about their future, their employment, their housing, their children: to those in isolation in hospitals and nursing homes; to those in ICU and those who wait anxiously for news. He is there in the work of doctors and nurses, carers. He is there among the vulnerable and those who care for them.

This Easter Day, in all its strangeness, may God open the hearts of all people to welcome and receive that peace which Christ freely gives, as only he can give, to us, to those we love, to all in need of his healing reconciling love this day.