

Heston Groenewald (Ordinand)
Easter3: Acts9.1-20; Rev.5.11-14; John2.1-19

London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down. London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady. On this day in 1968, London Bridge was sold to America. The predecessor to the current bridge was built in the 1830s, and just 100 years later was falling apart. Fortunately an American businessman offered to pay 2.5 million dollars for it. Apparently he might have thought he was buying Tower Bridge, but apparently he's always denied that... London Bridge was taken apart stone by stone, and re-created in Arizona, where it's now the second most popular tourist attraction after the Grand Canyon. Believe it or not. And believe it or not, we find something like that in each of today's readings!

All of our readings in Eastertide come from the New Testament, in celebration of Christ's resurrection- the fulfilment of the Old Testament's promises and end of its story. And so we turn first to the very end. Our reading from Revelation tells of the Lion of Judah, the conquering Messiah who wins a great, resounding victory over God's enemies. It also tells us though, that even as he triumphs, he redefines what it means to be triumphant. The mighty Lion of Judah turns out to be a lamb- a lamb who was slain, a lamb who bears the scars of suffering even in victory.

Christ's death and resurrection are the fulfilment of God's promises, starting a new era in human history. This is the time that the prophets and patriarchs longed to see, when God would step into the breach to save his people and his world. Just as the only way to save the damaged London Bridge was to take it apart and re-create it, so also, Israel and the world needed more than just a minor facelift. The world's problems go beyond a dodgy banking system, bickering politicians and volcanoes in Iceland- God's only option for perfection was re-creation. And that re-creation started with Christ. Crucified, dead and buried, and risen on the third day as the firstfruits of God's new creation, and through him, the whole world will be re-created and brought to perfection. And so Revelation tells us that the old order is passing away, to be replaced by new heavens and a new earth; swords will be beaten into ploughshares, death and suffering will be no more.

Christ's resurrection was the start of that process, and before long it was spreading, as Christ commissioned others to join this work of re-creation. This is plain to see in the story of Saul of Tarsus. The ultimate ultra-Orthodox Jew, Saul was zealous about the way of his fathers, and put all his energy into persecuting the early Church. That is, until he meets the risen Christ on the way to Damascus, and finds himself re-created into Paul. He's the same man, but a different man. Everything of the old life which he once valued- circumcision, pedigree, education- all of these become rubbish by the standards of this new, risen life. Christ becomes his new reference point for what is honourable, what is just, what is pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. Saul the Hebrew of Hebrews becomes Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

As for Paul, so also for Simon Peter. After the crucifixion, Peter had returned to Galilee and to his fishing boat. He'd heard from the other disciples that Christ had risen from the dead- and had even appeared to the other disciples, but not to him. And his denial of Christ was still fresh in his memory. Interestingly, John tells us that Peter's denials happened around *a charcoal fire* in the high priest's courtyard. It's an unusual word for fire, and it only appears one other time in the New Testament. And that is in today's gospel reading, when Christ meets Peter on the beach- at a charcoal fire. As Peter denied Christ three times at the previous charcoal fire, so at this one Jesus allows him to reaffirm his love three times. Simon the fisherman is re-created, into Peter the fisher of men, Peter the rock upon which Christ's Church will be built.

Having met the risen Christ, the response of both Paul and Peter is to go out and tell anyone and everyone. Paul 'at once began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God'. And as for Peter, in a few weeks' time we'll be observing Pentecost, when he proclaimed Christ's risen life to thousands on the streets of Jerusalem.

But both are warned that their message won't be well received by everyone. What is good news to some, is challenging, disturbing and uncomfortable for others. Peter will one day glorify God through his death. Paul must expect great suffering for God's name, and we read of that suffering in his letters- hunger and thirst, toil and hardship, beatings, stonings, shipwrecks and eventually death.

BUT being part of God's new creation was clearly good news to both Peter and Paul, and they needed to bear witness to it. Both could both endure their present sufferings, because they now shared Christ's risen life. They had been given a sneak preview of how the story ends. As Desmond Tutu once put it, 'I've read the end of the book, and we win!'

This Easter, we celebrate that victory, and consider our part in God's work. Most of us won't have to suffer for it like Peter or Paul, but we also, are witnesses to this good news. In baptism, we too die with Christ and are raised with him. At the Eucharist, we too live Christ's risen life as we share his body, and bring that life to others as we drink his cup. And so we say to each other 'The Lord be with you- and also with you'. But if we look back to before the New Testament, we find that these words haven't always been confined to church. In the Old Testament story of Ruth, we find Boaz going out to greet the workers in his field. 'The Lord be with you', he says, and they answer him 'The Lord bless you'. So while we're used to hearing these words in church, on a Sunday, from Angela, David or Rachel in their robes, Boaz used them at his workplace, on a weekday, wearing his gardening clothes.

This Easter, like Boaz, how might *we* bring God's presence and Christ's risen life, into the everyday lives of our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues, shopkeepers, students, teachers, and patients? Might we perhaps, say a prayer for someone, share a story about a moment of grace we've experienced, give someone a smile, take a few minutes to listen, maybe even have a conversation about the Lord of new life and what he's doing in our lives.

Even if London Bridge in Arizona might one day again be falling down, falling down, falling down, these little acts of praise are eternal, and we can look forward to the day when our praises are joined by the praises of every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that's in them: 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might, forever and ever!' Amen.