

Column

“Jesus lives, Thy terrors now can no longer appal us . . . Alleluia!” Thrilling words from a well-known Easter hymn, words worthy of thought and reflection at this season.

Easter means different things to different people. For some it means nothing more than a break from school. For others it means a time to get together with family and friends, perhaps with a festive meal. For still others it means coloured eggs, chocolate rabbits and excursions to parks.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with any of these activities. We need breaks from the harried routine of daily life. Pleasant visits with family and friends are too short and infrequent. Festive meals are always nice. Hiding eggs and watching children find them is a delightful and wholesome family activity.

But, hopefully this Easter will mean more than any of these things. Instead, the day and the season that follows will be a time of worship and reflection on a real, on-the-ground event that changed the world – the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Put another way, again to quote the words of the hymnwriter: the end of terror.

Death is a subject about which most of us don't like to think. It is a source of fear and terror, both bound up in its uncertainty. But, if we get our minds round the real meaning of Easter, this fear and terror goes away. How does this work?

Well, it is because Jesus experienced death for us. He took the big plunge into that unknown and dark abyss we call death and came out on top. In so doing – if we are united to Him in faith and baptism – He has made it safe for us to follow. We can, therefore, name Him not only as our Saviour, Redeemer, Sin-bearer—but also our Forerunner.

Many men down through the years – no less than many alive today – have had opinions about what happens after death, but only One has returned from the grave. To whom are you going to listen? In whom are you going to rest your hope? For me, it is going to be Man whose tomb was found empty.

He promised to go and prepare a place for us. He promised to come again and to receive us unto Himself. He promised never to leave us. He promised, in the end, new heavens and a new earth (Revelation 21). So, what have we to fear? The answer, of course, is nothing.

To quote additional words from the Easter hymnwriter:

“Jesus lives! Our hearts know well / Naught from us His love shall sever;
/ Life, nor death, nor death, nor powers of hell / Tear us from His keeping ever.
Alleluia!”

It is my fervent and earnest prayer that this Easter will be to you more than a day for feasting or visiting, that it will in fact be a day of wonder, worship and thanksgiving.

O God, who for our redemption didst give thine only begotten Son to the death of the Cross, and by his glorious resurrection hast delivered us from the power of our enemy; Grant us so to die daily from sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through the same thy Son Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Blue Ridge.