

Easter Sunday in Southwell Minster, 21st April 2019

If you could witness one moment in history, I wonder, what would it be? How about this moment: when the women were told, *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen.”*

For Christians all over the world this is the most hope-filled moment in history. It will hold special significance for the people of Paris this Easter morning as thousands meet near the forlorn sight of the great Notre Dame and yet confidently announce *‘Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia’*.

Whether it’s a magnificent building or someone dear to us – painful loss can turn to hope in the bright light of Easter morning.

A ‘moment’ was a medieval unit of time that could vary depending on the length of the solar day, but on average it corresponded to 90 seconds.

It took no more than 90 seconds for the women who came early in the morning to Jesus’ tomb, to move from aching grief to irrepressible wonder and joy.

Three days before, all they could do for six agonizing hours was watch from a distance as the ruling authorities dispensed their brutal justice.

What made their grief so difficult to bear was that in an age of despair Jesus had filled them with what seemed an unshakable hope.

Most of us have pivotal moments in our lives when within less than 90 seconds our world suddenly looks very different. On one level nothing's changed – we are still standing where we were before, the world still spinning on its axis at the same rate – yet on another level everything has changed, and life will never be the same, whether in a way surpassingly good or unremittingly bad.

It might be the consequence of a decision, or a chance encounter; it may be due to hurtful words that tumbled from our lips without proper care, or gracious words spoken to rebuild a relationship that seemed beyond repair. It could be receiving an unwelcome medical prognosis or the good news of something longed for.

Perhaps most powerfully of all is the moment when a tender declaration of love is expressed from the heart – as vulnerable as it is beautiful – alternatively the moment a devastating betrayal is uncovered.

Whatever soul-defining moments have punctuated our lives, right now the story of our nation is at a pivotal moment, with an outcome that's still unclear. Deep hope doesn't come from political solutions however cleverly designed or well-intended. It is not hope *for* something but hope *in* something we need the most.

Jesus taught his disciples not to base their hope on the circumstances of the present moment whatever it may hold. He called his followers to put their hope fully in him, confident that nothing could separate them from his transforming presence and purpose for their lives: no amount of uncertainty, disappointment, shame or despair could stand in the way. Because of the cross and the empty tomb the greatest enemy of hope had been defeated, sin and death had lost its fatal sting.

No wonder Peter ran so fast to the garden where the lifeless body of Jesus had been laid. *“Bending over, he saw strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away. Wondering to himself what had happened.”*

Peter is left to marvel and remember what Jesus had taught them – naturally the resurrection was too unbelievable to register with the disciples until after it

happened. Yet now for Peter it is a moment for reflection, decision and faith.

I don't know if you recognise the name Mel Blanc? He was the voice behind all the cartoon characters in Loony Tunes. At the end of every movie Porky Pig would come on screen, and would always say the same thing: *'That's all folks!'*

A few years back, Mel Blanc died. Can you guess what his family put on his tombstone? *'That's all folks!'* This really is the most important question that can ever be asked: which is true: 'Jesus Christ is risen from the dead' or *'That's all folks!'*

Resurrection was the only adequate explanation for what Peter had seen and heard, and before the day is out he will meet the risen Jesus in person. This is a pivotal moment not only in his life, but for all who will relive this moment through Luke's retelling.

Easter is not just a day to marvel, it is also a time to decide.

What is being offered to the world at great cost is the truly momentous gift of God's forgiveness in the here and now – and in the future eternal life: life so fulfilling that it disperses its joyful fragrance into every present

moment. This is why traditionally Easter is a season for people to be baptized and confirmed in the faith, as was the case last night in Nottingham and today all over the world.

Having hope in Christ doesn't make life easier. But knowing that the risen Jesus is with you and for you can transform the outlook on every moment however chaotic it may seem. Which includes the desperate chaos and grief of those churches in Sri Lanka so cruelly attached this Easter morning.

Over a hundred years ago in another season of tension and uncertainty for our nation, an eminent bishop, Handley Moule, put it like this when he wrote: *'There is no situation so chaotic that God cannot from that situation create something that is surpassingly good. He did it at creation. He did it at the cross. He is doing it still today.'*

It is hard to live well without hope. The risen Lord Jesus gives confidence not only to face the moment of death but also to seize the opportunities in life.

For this very reason the apostle Paul concluded, *"Therefore, be steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your life's work is not in vain."*