



ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Ecumenical Easter Letter

“Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory! The risen Saviour, our Lord of life, shines upon you! Let all God's people sing and shout for joy!”

These words of triumph are sung out across churches as Easter dawns. For centuries such sounds of joy at the Easter festival have echoed and continue to echo around the globe in a multitude of different tongues and cultural contexts, making a deep impact on the lives of Christians and Churches. With the confession of Jesus having conquered death we proclaim that we have been raised to new life in him.

In the 15th chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthian Christians St Paul couples the resurrection of Christ with confidence in the resurrection of Christ's people. The Apostle clearly states that the resurrection of Christ is a beginning, and that the hope of our own resurrection can only be in Christ. He argues; if the dead are not raised, then Christ is not raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then his proclamation is empty and our faith is in vain. Having laid out all the arguments that would dispose of the Christian claim to the risen Christ, he continues: ***‘But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.’*** This is the faith that is also proclaimed in the Byzantine opening to the Easter Liturgy and which has been the confession of Christians down the ages.

The resurrection of Christ is the great hope, not only for each of us individually, but also for today's troubled world - a world in which violence and violation of human rights describe the day to day context of people in many parts; a world in which moral and spiritual values often seem hopelessly inadequate against the forces of self-seeking gain in every sphere of life. It is also a world in which our brother and sister Christians are still a beleaguered and even persecuted community in many places, as they have been at different times and places in history. We continue to remember the suffering Christians in the Middle East. This year our remembrance is also focussed particularly on the Armenian people who a century ago were driven to their death and into exile because they were Christians.

It is into this world that the message of the Church at Easter remains constant over the centuries, proclaiming in the midst of hopelessness the hope of Christ, triumphant beyond death and the powers of evil; living and life giving amongst us.

In this resurrection faith we follow the saints and martyrs throughout the ages who have proclaimed the Risen Christ as their Lord and Saviour, who believe that in Christ there is abundant life and that death and suffering will not have the final say. The Easter faith strengthens us with the hope in life, here and now and in the world to come. This hope is not an illusion, which turns out to be empty; rather, it is the tested *cantus firmus* over the ages for all Christians. Beyond human imagination, the power of the resurrection overcomes disparate, conflict-laden and destructive forces. We are called to proclaim God's Good News in confidence and obedience to Christ to bring healing and reconciliation.

Christ's resurrection, therefore, also compels us to ever closer bonds of Christian fellowship with one another – the saints in the here and now - to seek greater unity and work together with Christ, as his Body, in the newness of life already begun by him.

It is in this spirit that I greet you with this letter. I will continue to pray that the hope and joy of the resurrected Christ will deeply move our hearts and souls, that it will heal relationships between individuals, communities and nations, and that it will banish fear, overcome suffering, broker peace and bring reconciliation.

I close with the Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:78): "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

I embrace you with brotherly love in the Risen Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Justin Welby". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby
Archbishop of Canterbury
Easter 2015