

BISHOP MARGARET B VERTUE
EASTER SERMON – 12 APRIL 2020

Readings: Acts 10: 34-43. Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, Matthew 28:1-10

Psalm 118:24

This is the day that the Lord has made, let us **rejoice** and be glad in it!

We prayed on Ash Wednesday for all those who would die this Lent, not realising that many of the deaths would be corona virus related. Yet, we **rejoice**, knowing that loved ones are separated from us by sight but never separated from God. We **rejoice** that Jesus is risen and our **ever- present** Lord, closer to us than our own breathing.

We **rejoice** that we are created **out of love, for love** and that we continue to be **created** moment by moment. We **rejoice** that this period of lock down, with all its uncertainties, has become a time of caring and sharing. Please share generously but do it in such a way as not to embarrass people.

We **rejoice** that we, have **His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa** as our State President at this time. He ended his address on last Thursday evening by telling us that it is a time of *“Hope, Recovery and Rebirth”*. We **rejoice** that God has slowed us down as a nation and as individuals to stop, to slow down awhile, to be kinder than we have ever been, to walk gently on God’s earth. We **rejoice** that God has carved out this time of solitude for us, even though it is hurting and will continue to hurt. It is a time of transformation, of deeper prayer and reflection for us.

We rejoice for the way our clergy have ministered to us during this shut down. I urge families to pray together and minister to one another during ‘low week.’

Alleluia Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia

Matthew 28:1-10 – The resurrection of Jesus

Jesus says: “Do not be afraid!”

We are afraid and it is natural to be afraid of the darkness of the global corona virus pandemic. Like the disciples of that first Holy Week, we have been through a roller coaster of emotions. The disciples had experienced eating and drinking with Jesus and one another at the Passover.

Since 23 March, the day the President announced the national lock down, we could no longer meet with each other. **Social distancing** has prevented us from going to church to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. The priests are, however, saying Mass privately at home and remembering the faithful at the altar of the Lord.

Like the disciples our people know the despair of not being able to grieve their loved ones at a funeral as numbers are limited. We may not travel. In a sense, like the disciples, we can only weep for the dead and remotely tend to the living. We do not know what to expect. Like Mary Magdalene, the other Mary and the disciples we run headlong this morning into the resurrected Jesus. We do not know whether to **scream or sing** but like the angel earlier, Jesus says to us: "Do not be afraid; go and tell." All our old, comfortable certainties have failed. The world is turned upside down.

Like for the two Mary's, there are consequences for us. There will be no returning to our old ways. Our commission from our resurrected Lord this morning is to **go and tell the good news**.

I pray that the light of the risen Christ pierces through our lives and into our hearts today. We need to see with the **eyes** of our **heart**. We need to move out of ourselves and be there totally for others. We give thanks and pray for our health care workers and essential services personnel. The scourge of the corona virus puts **concrete doing** into perspective. Being **isolated** has helped us to experience the **whole of life** as prayer, including our struggles and our desires. The Holy Spirit is busy doing a work of resurrection and transformation in us as individuals, as a church, as a nation.

God will make a way through this pandemic where there seems no other way, to the glory of God. **The stone is rolled away**. For whom are we to roll the stone away this Easter season? Easter is not just today, it is a season, a full 50 days. I pray that we will ask God to **roll the stone away** that is keeping our **hands** closed and not **stretched open** to help those in need. Each one of us has a little or lot more than the next one. Let us practice a bit of self-denial so that we can share. Are we up to date with our dedicated giving to our church?

Children who are depended on **school feeding** are now hungry. Many, many people have been **laid off work** without pay. I trust that you have done the right thing by paying your domestic workers and gardeners in advance for staying at home? The Hope Africa fundraising appeal for food parcels has not really taken off. Please consider making a donation to that appeal. The details are on our

website. The other option is to give directly to the Disaster Relief Fund of the Diocese towards soup kitchens and food parcels. Many people are wounded by poverty, unemployment and inequality.

I pray that God will **roll the stone away** from our **lips**; that we will speak words of truth, peace, hope and encouragement. May we speak out so that people can be healed from social ills. I pray that God will **roll the stone away** from our **hearts** so that we will respect one another. Who do we need to reconcile with during this Easter? I pray that God will **roll the stone away** from our **minds** so that we do not think less of others; that we will do the things God wants us to do. That we will not give into sin and temptation. We are **watching and waiting** for the curve of the corona virus to be flattened sufficiently for the lock down to be lifted. **Watching and waiting** can be difficult. Everyone of us, not only clergy, are called to offer a service of love and loyalty to people who are sobbing because their lives are out of control. Everything we have is pure grace. All is God's gift. May we deeply realise that. The consolation of Easter is that the Risen Lord is inviting us to new places in our lives journey.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are an Easter people. We belong to the risen Lord. May our Lord grant you a most blessed and grace filled Easter May the risen Lord fill your hearts with peace, hope and joy. May He shower graces upon all of us and may we be open to receive the graces that the Risen Lord is offering us.

Be grateful that God has invited us to be partners in God's mission. Do not be afraid. Go and tell your brothers and sisters that even though our churches are shut, God is making house calls, there they will see Him, at home.

I am, because we are, because God is ... opening hearts to heal God's world.

Happy Easter.

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Christ is Risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen**

BISHOP MARGARET B VERTUE

Bishop of False Bay

(Lockdown day 17)