



Bishop Jonathan's Easter Message

I am recording this message at the brand-new Rochester Riverside Church of England Primary School, whose official opening we have been celebrating today.

It has been fabulous to see the school's wonderful facilities and to meet some of the staff, parents and children who are beginning to create a whole new community of learning right in the heart of this historic city – right at the heart of what used to be a busy commercial district, buzzing with ships being unloaded, and fruit and veg being put onto trains and lorries destined for London and beyond.

The opening of our new school is a story of transformation and new life in this part of Rochester, and it is marvellous that the Church of England is at the heart of this, as part of our commitment to the flourishing of our communities right across Medway, Kent, Bromley and Bexley.

What a contrast this is, however, with the horrors faced by children in Gaza, in Ukraine, in Yemen, in Sudan, and in countless other places torn apart by war. There children are no longer able to learn and grow in peace and security.

Instead, they hide in shelters, uncertain when the next rockets will fall on their neighbourhoods, whether their homes will still exist by that evening, or whether there will be food and water for them that day or the next.

The kind of destruction that we see at the moment in Gaza, as well as in other places that have slipped off our TV screens, is an affront to our longing for justice and our desire for children everywhere to be able to grow and learn in peace.

Our Christian faith requires that we should do all we can to resist the powers of death and destruction, including by calling the world's leaders to the path of justice and peace. The message of Good Friday and Easter is that victory over death has happened once and for all through Jesus Christ and is possible even in the darkest places of our world.

Jesus laid down his life so that we might go free, not to live for ourselves, but to help build a better and more just world, and to help others discover for themselves the transforming power of God at work in them and through them.

It is not enough for us simply to rejoice and give thanks for Jesus' resurrection from the grave at Easter. We also need to play our part in bringing to others the good news of Jesus' amazing victory over death, and in reshaping our world by challenging injustice and by seeking to rebuild what has been lost.

These words are a powerful, revolutionary statement – and they should draw from us an equally powerful response:

Alleluia! Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia**

The Rt Rev Dr Jonathan Gibbs

The Bishop of Rochester

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He is Risen. Alleluia!

By the time you are reading this it should be Easter Sunday. Once more we have journeyed with Jesus in Holy Week on his last few days leading to his crucifixion and resurrection.



I wonder how the disciples felt; confused, grief-stricken, angry, depressed, fearful?

Well to quote a well-known phrase “You never know what is around the corner.”

After all, have you ever put your trust in someone only to be let down so completely and unexpectedly that it shakes your whole existence? I hope not. But if you have, you may have an idea of how the women who found Jesus’ tomb empty on the first Easter day around 2000 years ago felt that day.

But remember too Mary Magdalen’s reaction when she realises that the “gardener” is in fact the risen Jesus – she exclaims “Rabboni” and runs off to tell the others “I have seen the Lord!”

No one living through that first Easter had any idea what was around the corner for them – from the Pharisees who hoped their troubles were over as Jesus’ body was buried – to the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb, to the disciples who moved from devastation to confusion then to delight in the space of a few days.

But Jesus’ resurrection was not the end of the disciples’ problems. Not everything became straight forward and easy for them. Life remained as unpredictable and at times as risky, as it had been before.

What changes at the resurrection for the disciples is their confidence in Jesus, the sense of realising that they had been in the presence of someone so special. And therefore, that what he had been teaching was not just a good

idea but the way to live – the life of love and forgiveness, for them and for everyone.

And so they followed in Jesus' footsteps – trusting when things were difficult and coping when things went wrong.

None of us know what lies around the corner for us. But, as Christians we have the confidence that whatever we face we do so in the company of the risen Christ and follow in his footsteps. An invitation Jesus offers to us all.

Happy Easter

Rev Susan