

## **St Peters' College Chapel Trinity Term 2020**

Each week during the COVID 19 lockdown, St Peter's College Chapel continues to meet as a community, not only in online Sunday services, but in a weekly series of written reflections, prayers and recordings of music performed by members of St Peter's College Choir. The contributions of individual singers from St Peter's, recorded in their own homes, are gathered together in synchronized performances.

### **An Easter Reflection with Prayers and Music for week of 26 April 2020**

#### **Reflection**

In the final reading in our advent carol services I read the traditional words from the Prologue to John's Gospel, 'The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not overcome it'. The phrase encapsulates the hope at the centre of the Christian faith that God



*Figure 1 The Choir at the Advent Service*

breaks into the darkness of the world in the person of Christ. In the Christian faith, light and darkness are not regarded as equals, rather, the darkness fails to overcome this light because the light is none other than the self-revelation of God.<sup>1</sup>

In the current crisis, darkness has reared its head in so many forms: relationships have been dislocated as our college community scattered; we can no longer meet with family members who we love. Any security that we derived from the routine of our daily lives seems less certain, for, as Simone Weil commented, 'affliction compels us to recognise as real what we

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<sup>1</sup> See John Ashton's discussion of Dualism in John's Gospel: John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, (Oxford, 2007), 389f.

do not think possible'.<sup>2</sup> Yet for Christians, hope is not dependent on the world's systems and structures continuing as they are. Indeed in his book *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, the eminent scientist and clergyman, Professor John Polkinghorne, makes the point that scientists agree that the physical processes of this present universe can end only in futility.<sup>3</sup> Against such a bleak outlook, Christian theology asserts that hope lies in God being faithful to his promise to forgive the sins of the penitent, to raise the dead, and to bring about a newly-restored heaven and earth. This may sound like religious 'clap-trap' yet, before you dismiss this, I suggest that, in addition to the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, the way in which humans experience the world points to the survival of human life, love, meaning and music beyond the grave. Indeed the cycles we see in nature serve to remind us that life can come even from death: the seed that falls into the ground and dies brings new fruit in due season.<sup>4</sup> Now I am not suggesting that our embodied lives continue to live on beyond the grave or that we climb out of the grave physically in the way suggested by Stanley Spencer's rather comical painting, *The Resurrection, Cookham, 1924-7*.

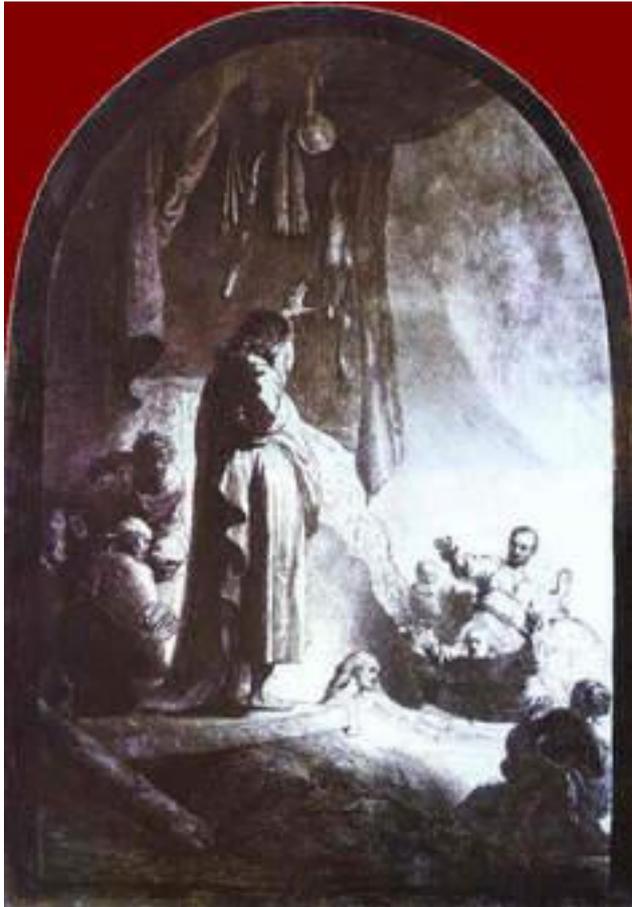


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<sup>2</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (1947; Eng. Trans. Routledge, 1952), 73

<sup>3</sup> John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, (London, 2002), 25

<sup>4</sup> See John's Gospel, 24-36



But what I am saying is that I believe there are good grounds for believing that reality is underpinned by a faithful God who has power to recreate each individual<sup>5</sup> and to raise them to new life and to a new order characterised by the absence of death, crying, mourning and pain.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly before the lockdown began in the UK, I was able to attend the new exhibition on Rembrandt's pictures that had just opened at the Ashmolean

Museum in Oxford. I went on one of the guided tours where the art historian drew the group's attention to Rembrandt's sketch 'The Raising of Lazarus'. The sketch depicts a rather surprised Lazarus struggling to get up out of his grave in response to Jesus' command. His expression is not unfitting given John's Gospel records that Lazarus had been dead for four days prior to being raised to life. The purpose of the miracle (or 'sign' to use John's terminology) is to point to Jesus as the one with power over life and death – a claim that seems ironic given that only a few days later Jesus himself was put to death. Yet, the Christian faith is founded on the miracle of God raising Jesus from the dead, a point which makes Christianity unique among the world religions.<sup>7</sup> The resurrection of Jesus is an event

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<sup>5</sup> See John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (New Jersey 4<sup>th</sup> edn.1990), 122-5

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 21:4

<sup>7</sup> This point is made by Richard Swinburne, *Is there a God?* (OUP, 1996, 2nd edn. 2010), 110

that is foundational for humanity as it holds out hope of forgiveness, healing, restoration and being 're-centred' in God.<sup>8</sup>

Our current crisis brings us face to face with the frailty of human life. Many of us are fearful for ourselves or for those we love. Some of us have already been affected by the tragedy of loss in untimely death. Yet the post mortem hope is of light and life through Christ who has gone before us through death into the presence of God. This is the Easter hope that Christians have proclaimed for centuries. It is a hope that rises above the uncertainties of this world. Ultimately it is a hope that rests on the trustworthiness of God in whose hands lie the beginning and the end, and the beginnings and endings of all for whom we love and pray.

## **Prayers**

### **The Collect for Easter Sunday**

Lord of all life and power,  
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son  
overcame the old order of sin and death  
to make all things new in him:  
grant that we, being dead to sin  
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,  
may reign with him in glory;  
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit  
be praise and honour, glory and might,  
now and in all eternity.  
Amen

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<sup>8</sup> Rowan Williams, *Resurrection, Interpreting the Easter Story* (DLT, 1982; new repr. edn. 2014), 110.

## **A Prayer published by the Church of England about the COVID 19 outbreak**

Keep us, good Lord

Under the shadow of your mercy

In this time of uncertainty and distress

Sustain and support those who are fearful, and lift up all who are brought low;

that we may rejoice in your comfort knowing that nothing can

separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen

### **Music**

[Individual singers from St Peters College Choir sing Marenzio's motet 'Quia vidisti me'](#)

**(You Tube video)** Branwen Thistlewood (soprano), Millie Cant (alto), Tim Crook-Sycamore (tenor) and Joseph Smales (bass). Thanks are due to John Warner for producing the video.

*Text: Quia vidisti me, Thoma, credidisti: beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt. Alleluia.*

*Translation: Because you, Thomas, have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are they who have not seen me and yet have believed. Alleluia. (St John, 20:29)*

### **Commentary on Marenzio 'Quia Vidisti me' by Professor Edward Higginbottom**

Luca Marenzio (1556-1599) was a 16<sup>th</sup>-century composer who spent most of his life in Rome. He had considerable success as a madrigalist, anticipating in his later work something of the ultra-expressive *secunda prattica* of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. His church music was more conservative. 'Quia vidisti me' (*Motectorum pro festis totius anni*, 1585) is a setting of a text associated in the Feast of St Thomas. It sits perfectly within the Easter season. It recounts the meeting of Thomas, doubting Thomas, with Christ following the

resurrection. This is the meeting where Christ says to Thomas: Blessed are they who have not seen but who have believed. At this point in the motet (*'Beati qui non viderunt . . .'*) Marenzio writes in what is known as the familiar style, a chordal idiom where all voices align. The opening and closing parts of the motet are in the imitative style, closely worked (stretto) entries in four voices, but with clear cadential points. There is no difficulty in following the text in its multi-layered presentation. The final section is a joyful Alleluia, where the metre changes to triple time. The whole motet is modest in scale, functional in purpose, but highly successful in effect.

- For further details of online services, please contact the Chaplain:
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