

Easter 2008.

Waking up this morning you could be forgiven for thinking that this was more like Christmas Day than Easter Day – this ridiculously early Easter has meant that we have the feeling that we have only just got over Christmas – and now here we are at the end of what felt for me any rate a rather strange Lent and Holy Week celebrating the great Easter festival. But even if this seem a little strange to be into Easter before March is out and with wintry weather returning – it does give us a chance make a small comparison between the two great Christian festivals. In doing so I want to say to you all – and I know this may seem strange – but I want to say – “thank you” – “thank you for being Easter people”.

I guess I need to explain that. Easter people in my humble opinion are very different from Christmas people. Easter people are the very essence of the church – the very core of what the church should be and I pray is. Easter people are truly Christ’s body here on earth – they know what it is to walk the way of the Cross with our Lord and they know what it is to rejoice in his resurrection. And they know how important that is in our lives. Easter people are people of the Resurrection and above all they are committed to following Christ – that is why together we will renew our baptism promises during this service – for Easter people are people of commitment. And I am not sure that that can be said of those hundreds who come to this church over the Christmas period. I am not wanting to denigrate in any way those who do share in our Christmas celebrations – it would be sad if they did not come to church at that time – but what I really want to celebrate is those of you who on this day commit yourselves again to being Easter people – people who will be Christ’s disciples – his body, his hands, his feet, his mouth, his eyes – here on earth. Today we celebrate the message of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ – but we also celebrate those who make that resurrection real in their own lives and commit their lives to making the resurrection real in the lives of those who they meet each day of their life. Today I want to celebrate your commitment.

One person, other than Jesus of course, links the two great festivals. And that is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Many people claim that Mary is the first disciple – and I would want to go along with that idea. She is not only the first disciple but a model of discipleship – as such she is someone who we might study to ways in which we too might be better disciples of our Lord.

Mary’s life is one of total commitment. She offers her life to God – “be it unto me according to your will” she says at the conception of Jesus – and throughout Jesus’ life, she remains the committed mother right up to the time when she is there watching her beloved son die on a cross. Over thirty years of commitment to Christ – the child she bore and nurtured – the man she cared for and loved – the son who dies a hideous death on a rubbish tip outside the city of Jerusalem as she looked on helpless. Much of discipleship is as Mary so wonderfully displays about commitment.

But commitment is no longer something that the modern person does (or is it the post-modern person) – to put it up-to-date language – it is not sexy. Today people shy away from commitment. It is seen as something that ties a person down – you lose your freedom – your identity. I gets in the way of doing my own thing and following my own will. It is seen as stifling that new religion we have today that I call

“individualism” – a belief that praises us for my commitment solely to myself and all those whose company I enjoy.

There is a grave lack of commitment in our present society and the result has been catastrophic to the way our lives are led – clubs, societies, political parties and of course churches – all suffer for lack of commitment. It is a great blight on our way of life. It means that the social web of our community life is very brittle and the rich diversity of social interaction that builds up good and happy communities is under threat.

But you are Easter people and that makes you subversive to the modern trends. You are committed people and that makes you different – thank God. The commitment we have to the risen Christ entails also a commitment to a better world, the new social order that Jesus called “the Kingdom of God”. Such a commitment means often a costly confrontation with the ways of the world – for some in the history of the church it meant martyrdom – for us it will mean sometimes standing out from that which is taken as normal in this abnormal society of ours. And that is why we need each other – this commitment cannot be carried out alone – we need the Christian community around us – supporting and encouraging each one of us to that commitment to build the Kingdom of God in this place.

St.Paul wrote to the Christian people in Philippi – I thank God every time I remember you”. This Easter I want to thank God for each one of you – for your commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ – for your commitment to his Kingdom – for being truly God’s Easter people.

Finally, the only reason why we are committed is that through faith we have discovered the secret of this Christian discipleship. We have discovered that God is totally committed himself to each of us – a commitment so great that he gave us his son, to die so that we might live – to live not only in the eternal realm but now – for discipleship of Christ means that we are re-born to a new life, resurrected life – as Jesus offers – life in all its fullness. Rejoice you Easter people – for Christ is risen and we are people of that resurrection.