

Easter Sunday 2007

See how close the Easter experience comes to our real condition! Mary of Magdala, in the bleak morning of the first day of the rest of her life, hasn't the slightest thought of resurrection. She thinks there's been a grave-robbery. You have to conclude that she came to the tomb *wanting* to find that the corpse was still in place. That's how far we can all get from hope.

People will go a long way down the road to despair, simply because they are so convinced that no news is the *only* good news; that nothing radically life-giving or positive will ever happen to them. Anything else is for the sort of people who believe in Lottery wins that translate them in one stroke to the super-rich category.

It ought to be very clear to us that if we expect the worst, we make it tremendously likely that the worst will come to pass. We've got ourselves ready for it, and if it lets us down now we shall actually be sorry. We are like the suffering servant, who says *I have set my face like flint*. Don't try to sell me consolation, I'm past it.

The scene inside the tomb is immensely eloquent as Peter and the Beloved Disciple enter it, and we are told that the Beloved Disciple *sees and believes*. This represents an entirely different cast of mind. He looks at the discarded grave-cloths, and he *sees* resurrection.

Seeing that leads to believing is what we have to cultivate. It's a moral question for us. Easter isn't there to stop all arguments and "convince" us of anything. Rather it calls us to a new mode of thought and hope. One of the conditions for it is actually contained in the first Commandment: that we should not tie ourselves to any image of God. God is different, is other than we expect him to be. He will always exceed our expectation; and he will always unite the very meaning we most fear with the future we dare not expect. So if we come to life expecting a funeral, he will meet us there, and show us that a funeral is not quite what we were expecting.

The wonderful story of the widow of Nain is one of my favourites. He meets a funeral procession, one of peculiar sadness, which expresses the final loss of everything for a poor widow. Instead of bowing respectfully, and letting the funeral pass him by, with execrable bad taste he simply halts the cortège in its tracks. Then he calls the boy from the dead, and gives him back to his mother.

The Gospel of Easter is that we have to reopen our negotiations with life, to refuse to be governed by despair, to let ourselves be closed down by bad news. The Gospel of Easter undercuts *all* bad news. It never does away with it, and I could tell you right now a series of twenty or thirty tough situations which would make another story for the Widow of Nain. None of this signifies anything in the teeth of the Easter message, which turns the human disaster of Golgotha into the wild joy of this morning, with its deserted grave, and its disciples who had never understood until now, *that he must rise from the dead*.