

Year C
Second Sunday of Easter
Acts 5:27-32
Revelation 1:4-8
John 20:19-31

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

Because we're in a church and it's a good place to confess things, how many people here like to turn to the back page of a book before they start reading it? If my Mum is watching, I hope she's got her hand up! Whilst I don't understand it, for many people they need to know the outcome before they invest the time in reading, for many they can't stand the suspense, a reason why binge-watching box sets is so popular as well. Today in our readings we have done just done that, we've jumped to the end of the book with our reading from Revelation. If you've never read the Bible before I don't recommend that you start with Revelation, to be fair if you have read the Bible before I still don't recommend Revelation, unless you're a massive fan of Sci-Fi or Fantasy or things written under the effects of illicit substances.

Having said all that our reading from Revelation does help us a bit with what we are doing here this morning. Let's try an experiment ... who knows what Alpha means? And Omega? Yes, they are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and they are used to describe Jesus because he is the

beginning and end of our faith and our lives. And what we gather today for is a beginning as we baptise Felix into the death and resurrection of Jesus, and as all of us try to begin to live into the resurrection life on offer.

A week ago, the world changed. Death was defeated, sin overcome, a new kingdom established as we celebrated Easter Day. But you wouldn't believe that from our Gospel reading this morning, would you? It almost feels like we've gone back in time, that nothing spectacular happened.

Post-resurrection, post the amazing and extraordinary events of that first Easter morning, the disciples are still doing what the disciples do best, not quite getting it. When Jesus breathes on them and sends them out, John has them still shut in a room a week later. Surely the resurrection should have changed all that!

But the resurrection is not an end, it is a beginning. A beginning of a new hope, a beginning of a new life, a beginning of a new reality.

And baptism is the sacrament of that new beginning, the sacrament of new life. A sacrament is a physical sign of something that is happening inside of us by God's grace. Because we are created physical beings, God deals with us in

physical ways, God enables us to bump against God's grace with physical things and in baptism we do that with oil, water and fire! Ordinary things carry extraordinary meaning.

Oil:

Oil used to be expensive and so was used for important events. Oil means a setting apart, in our reading from Revelation we heard that God has created a kingdom of priests. And as we mark Felix with oil today, we recognise that he is joining that kingdom of priests. Not that he has to spend the rest of his life dressed in black, but that he has been set apart to serve God. That is the new beginning. All of us who are baptised have been set apart for that task, and whether we've been good at it or not, today is a day of new beginning, a day of reminding ourselves that if we are to live into the resurrection life that is part of our calling.

Water:

John isn't being over subtle when he says Jesus breathed on them, we are supposed to remember creation, the hovering of the Spirit over chaos, over the waters of creation, the breath of life into Adam. But water also reminds us of the end, of death for we are baptised into Christ's death. If we were going to plunge Felix into the water (if the bowl were big enough) it would be a

symbol of him going into the grave and coming back again. That's quite a powerful statement, particularly as we're also celebrating Felix's health getting stronger after a worrying period. Water reminds us that in baptism, in participating in Christ's death we are washed clean to enjoy a new life.

Fire:

And then there's fire! Yes, we're going to use fire, don't panic only in the form of a candle but fire none-the-less. When we give Felix the fire, we're going to tell him to shine as a light for Christ. And as we tell him that we remind ourselves of that as our task. What all our readings are asking us to think about this morning is how you and I are witnesses of the resurrection. How you and I shine the light of Christ's new life.

Ordinary things, with extraordinary meaning. And that's not just the oil, water and fire, that's you and me. We are ordinary people but with extraordinary potential. Friends, the resurrection opens up new possibilities for us, it is a source of joy and hope, but it doesn't necessarily change the here and now immediately. As we learn to live into the truth of the resurrection, we do so in the context of the reality of the world we live in. Peace is still elusive; society is still divided; we are still quicker to demonise than to engage;

economies teeter on the brink; and death still robs us of those we love, of those who have served dutifully and faithfully.

The resurrection is a beginning. A new beginning. As is baptism, and what we do for Felix today we are all invited to participate in. We haven't got to have it all figured out, Thomas shows us that, there is room for doubters and sceptics, indeed a need for them to help us shape what we believe. Being sent in the power of the Spirit is all we need, and we have been. It means we continue to explore what forgiveness and grace mean for each one of us as we open ourselves to the breath of the Spirit, hovering over the chaos and complexity of our own beings and lives.

And in this new life, there's no need to skip to the end, because there is no end, God's love for us is endless. So come, let us begin, as Felix begins to take the next step into resurrection life, today, ordinary people made extraordinary in the resurrection of Christ and in baptism.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!