

Hymns: **298** “Christ the Lord is risen today”
 294 “**All ye that seek the Lord who died**”
 591 “**Let all mortal flesh keep silence**”
 “His life goes marching on”

Reading: **Mark 16:108**

“I’M GOING ON AHEAD OF YOU”

Earlier this week a monstrous weapon of war was inflicted on remote parts of Afghanistan. This mighty instrument of destruction was even given a name.

Yesterday, in the vicinity of John Wesley’s House, we held a “teddy bear’s picnic”. It was heart-warming to see dozens of Ursuline Edwards ranged around the history-filled rooms of the Wesley household. What amazed me was that each of these cuddly toys seemed to have his/her own special name.

So this enormous explosive devise dropped a few days ago on an unsuspecting populace on another continent, just like the little bears, had its own cuddly name. Moab – that’s it. It’s an acronym turned into a nickname. The letters stand for Massive Ordinance Air Blast or, as the President of the USA puts it, in his inimitable, cuddly way: It’s the Mother Of All Bombs.

They couldn’t have found a better name for this phenomenon. Moab, in biblical times, was the territory to be found on the eastern banks of the river Jordan. It had been populated by the descendants of Moab just after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moab was Lot’s son born incestuously to his daughter. So Moab saw the light of day in a cave (see Genesis 17). It was an illegitimate relationship. As I say, what a good name to have chosen for the bomb dropped this week.

This morning, however, we are gathered to remember an explosion much bigger than this mother of all bombs. It too began in a cave – a tomb to be precise. As its energy burst forth from that hiding place, so it reduced those who witnessed it sheer awe and terror and amazement. They had thought the story was ended when, in fact, it had only just begun. They had thought that the body lay a mouldering in the grave when, in fact, it wasn’t there any longer. They had thought their frenetic lives could now enjoy some calm when, in fact, they couldn’t.

For Jesus was still on the move. Just imagine the case. They’d worn themselves out following him around the countryside. They’d left their jobs and livelihoods in order to be his disciples. There were glamorous moments but far more tiresome ones to contend with. It was all clearly leading towards a climax fraught with difficulty. They’d walked with him through those last days into one challenging

situation after another. They'd seen him humiliated and scorned, whipped and laughed at, strung up and killed. It must have been agonising for them. They must have been totally disillusioned. They must have been filled with fear for their own futures.

Beyond all that, they had begun to do the natural thing when faced by death. They had, with great tenderness, taken down the body and carried it to a tomb donated by Simon of Cyrene. They had carefully cleaned and dressed the body. They'd brought spices and aromatic oils. They were familiar with death and knew exactly what to do. Above all, he was now in one place. They were in control of him. I suspect that beyond the grief and the sorrow lay a small measure of relief that the suffering was all over and the running around finished.

And yet none of this proved to be true. The resurgent energy that was released by the resurrection phenomenon led to the "life-force" infusing, inspiring and impelling the friends of Jesus into even more activity. The story wasn't finished at all. A page had simply been turned.

Don't hang around here – that was the message. He's not here – the angel said. You'd better go to Galilee – he's waiting for you there.

I've deliberately wanted to compare the explosive news of the resurrection with the destructive blast of the mother of all bombs for two reasons. Firstly, the burst of energy that emanates from the risen Jesus has been a force for good. It's lasted for centuries. It continues to create tsunamis of responses around the world. All that in contrast to this week's puny device whose outcomes were so destructive and which sought simply to annihilate human activity. And secondly, the ripples and waves caused by that moment-in-time continue to do their beneficial work whereas the Afghanistan explosion is now yesterday's story.

All of which makes me tempted to give a chummy name to the resurrection explosion. I want to reinvest the word Moab with a significance more appropriate to the Good News of the Gospel. I've come up with several possibilities. What about **More Oomph And Better?** Or **Miracle, Opportunity, Action Brains?** Or **Move Over And Breath?** Or finally **Make Others Active Believers?** This was the mother of all blessings. It was the generator of a belief system that has claimed more adherence than any other religion since the beginning of time and over a longer period of time than most other similar phenomena.

The Resurrection of Jesus was an explosion to end all explosions. It changed the world. Within two or three generations the apparent defeat of the Cross had come to hold sway over the whole of the Mediterranean world. It changed the world for the better. It can be argued that human history hinges on this event and that human potential can be realised through it.

When we turn to the story as recounted in Mark's Gospel, we notice the only too human need to tidy up the story. To give it a ringing and decisive happy ending. But we should be very sceptical about this. It's important to note what kind of a book the bible is. It's the result of a process. A divinely given happening registered deeply in the lives of ordinary human beings, a divinely appointed person set up to help the

distressed and to address the need for justice and to exemplify unconditional love. But all these impressions and memories and insights had to be processed through an oral tradition before assuming the form they now take in our bibles. It's clear that some later editors were very worried about the fact that Mark's Gospel ended with the words "for they were afraid".

For that reason, they added the glosses, the tidying up phrases and formulae, which you can see in any modern bible.

But I'd prefer to remain with the original and imperfect ending. Let that fear reign. It's important for us never to settle for a happy ending to the story of Jesus however much we yearn for it. For the story goes on. And we'd do far better to allow ourselves to be prodded by our fear of the implications of the resurrection than to settle for a tale that's comfortable and nicely finished.

Later we'll take bread and wine, our act of Holy Communion, as a conclusion of the Easter Service. We'll leave this place in his strength. We'll go into our daily lives with More Oomph And Better; we 'll go knowing we can Move Out And Breathe; we'll go only too aware that Miracle, Opportunity, Action and Brains can enable us to Make Others Active Believers. That is the commission with which Christ's ministry on earth ends. We are now to follow this risen Lord and tell the whole world about him.

Glory, glory, hallelujah, `cos life goes marching on.

Alleluia! The Lord is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!