

**An Easter Message 2021  
from Archbishop Anne**



Every family has a celebration meal that serves to remind them when they are not together of feasts in times gone by. In our family it was my mother's specialty – roast beef and Yorkshire pudding with gravy, roast potatoes and two vegetables. Mum made the best lemon meringue pie for dessert with condensed milk, eggs and lemon juice – the meringue made to look like snow peaks tall and stiff.

Children were shooed out of the kitchen while the celebration meal was prepared. Our job was to set the table, which she reset afterwards as it was never to her liking.

At table, dad opened the 'best' South African wine in his cellar. My sister and I got new dresses and shoes for Easter, new haircuts. Family friends were invited over to share the feast – couples or singles who would have been alone.

Celebration meals in our family were noisy affairs with people talking over each other as they caught up on news. Afterwards, with bellies stuffed so full we could hardly move there was charades, and when a musician entered the family there was music to accompany the meal.

Like our family, and every family, Isaiah knows that God's best work is celebrated with food, especially following a dark or difficult time.

*"On this mountain," he says, "The Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well aged wines." (Is. 25.6-9)*

These words must have come as something of a surprise to the exiled people of Israel who felt judged by God. In the chapter just before this one, the prophet speaks about the impending judgment upon the earth – *"Now the Lord is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate."* (24) Every part of the earth will be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled because the people have sinned.

The taste of hopelessness and death must have been in their mouths as they heard those words. Despair has a taste too, doesn't it? It's bitter which makes it hard to swallow.

When Mary Magdalene came to the garden early in the morning that first Easter, the taste of death, despair, and hopelessness was in her mouth - the smells and sounds of Good Friday's gruesome crucifixion still lingering even after three days. Perhaps, for Mary, death smelled like the vinegar which the soldier had soaked on a sponge and held up to Jesus' mouth on a hyssop stick.

At the moment of Jesus' death, Isaiah's prophecy had been fulfilled and darkness had come over the whole land. Mary's heart was heavy as she carried the spices; the heavily scented mixture of myrrh and aloes, another familiar reminder of death, to the tomb to prepare the body of her friend Jesus for burial.

We all know this world of death and grief – it is in every news broadcast as the coronavirus pandemic continues to wreak havoc in every corner of the globe.

However, not only is God's best work celebrated with food, God's best work gets done in moments like this when everything seems to be utterly hopeless and devoid of all meaning or purpose. You see, in Christ, death never has the final word and that's the meaning of Easter.

Isaiah prophesied:

*“He will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all the nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces” (Isaiah 25.7)*

As Isaiah looks ahead to this extraordinary time and meal on the mountain with marrow fat and well-aged wines, he sees that everything and everyone will be changed. Not just for one or two people, but for everyone.

All people shall eat the feast.

All people shall have the death shroud removed.

All tears shall be wiped away. All, all, all.

This is not only the promise of Isaiah, this is the promise of the Resurrection of Christ for all of humanity.

The symbol of it, of course, is the empty tomb, and the presence of the risen Lord. It's what Mary found when she heard her name being called and discovers that the gardener is the Risen Christ.

Everything changes in an instant when new life appears.

Mary is instructed not to keep this presence or this knowledge to herself but is commissioned by Jesus to tell others what she has seen and heard.

The Easter gospel ends with exactly this, Mary running to tell the story – “I have seen the Lord.” Something really big is begun in the resurrection of Christ. The word we use is ‘salvation’ – the experience of being rescued.

It's the knowledge that death does not have the last word.

It's the trust that God is stronger than any real or impending disaster.

It's the assurance that God is at work when we see no evidence of that.

It's the promise from Romans that, *“neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us ‘ALL’ from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8.37-39)*

On Easter death is swallowed up. It's a day of celebration.

Which is why over the years we gather every Sunday for a Eucharistic feast of bread and wine around the Lord's table. Every Sunday is the Day of Resurrection.

While it is not possible for us to gather together physically this Easter to share in this sacred meal, we do have a corporate memory of past Eucharistic feasts as well as a vision for future meals. We remember, not only to re enact the past but to be transformed for the hopeful future God is calling us to.

Let's make this Easter really special at home with 'family bubbles' or online feasts with loved ones in different cities. Prepare your festive table with candles and flowers. Use your best china. Spend time with loved ones preparing the festive meal. Wear your Sunday best. Share stories of past Easter celebrations and talk about what next Easter will be like as, God-willing, we will gather in person once again. Read the story of Christ's resurrection. Pray the prayers. For in them there is life. There is hope. For we have Christ who died and rose so we might live. It is not finished. New life is just begun.

Wishing you and those you love a most holy and blessed Easter.

With love in the Risen Christ,

+ *Anne*

