

*[Speaking from the chancel steps in front of scaffolding and a plastic wrapped Christus Rex all in place for painting still in progress]*

I was in the church earlier this week with my wife, Laura, and I was telling her that though the church was about to get a good clean, the scaffolding around the altar, which you see behind me, would still be up today because the work at the front of the church isn't finished. It's still a work in progress. And Laura suggested that we hang some sheets off the scaffold to cover up the half-completed work. You can see it's all a bit unsightly with the Christus Rex covered in plastic and the paint job half done. I thought it was not a bad idea and hanging up sheets would stop people from forming a view as to whether they like the color or not before the work is finished. So, I thought Laura's suggestion was a good one. However, on reflection, you'll see that I chose to do something that I very, very rarely do, I didn't follow my wife's advice.

It occurred to me in the middle of the night that there's something very poignant about preaching on Easter Sunday in front of Jesus who's wrapped up. Because the whole point of Easter, the reason that we're here still celebrating this story two thousand years later is that on that first Easter Sunday Jesus *wasn't* wrapped up. In the paragraph before where our reading from St. John's Gospel begins, it says this, "They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with spices in the linen cloths." But Jesus didn't stay wrapped up. When the disciples got to the tomb, they saw the linen wrappings lying there, but there was nobody inside them. And the linen cloths are mentioned three times in that paragraph at the start of our reading. And the word that is used about the cloths implies that they aren't just lying down limp like a balloon that the air has gone out.

The word John chooses suggests he wants to emphasize that the grave clothes were undisturbed by the resurrection. It's not that Jesus has tidied it up after himself. Jesus passed through the linen cloths that he was wrapped in when he was raised from death. Jesus has been raised from the dead by some extraordinary divine power. He has broken the bonds of death. There were no wrappings which could contain him. Whilst it might not be fitting to have a

wrapped-up Jesus before us today, there is something a bit more fitting about having the scaffolding still here. It reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus is still a work in progress just as our restoration is a work in progress. So, Paul says that the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead is the first fruits of the resurrection. Not the last fruits, the first fruits.

We celebrate today our grounds for hope. The resurrection of Jesus wasn't something that just happened to him. The resurrection of Jesus wasn't a happy ending tacked on to the Gospels. The resurrection is a foretaste of what lies ahead for all God's people. St. Paul says, "As in Adam, all die. So in Christ, we'll be made alive." We celebrate today the fact that Jesus has blazed a trail for us, that he has opened up the gates of heaven. Death has lost its sting. Death is not the last word for those who believe. By his resurrection, Jesus has defeated the power of death and we can share in that promise of eternal life. We can share in the hope that is based on Christ's resurrection.

Finally, I should say that one day quite soon the painting will be completed in the church here. The scaffolding will come down. The Christus Rex will be unwrapped. There will be an invading of the work that has been done and all will be revealed. What you see now is not the final look. And at Easter we are mindful that one day in glory the veils, the wrappings which now cloud our vision will be removed. As St. Paul famously said, "For now we see in a mirror dimly but then we shall see face to face." And elsewhere he talks about how when one turns to the Lord, the veil which clouds our vision is removed. He goes on, "All of us with unveiled faces will see the glory of the Lord." So, at this Easter, the Easter we celebrate at St. James with a wrapped up Jesus, let us remember that we too are a work in progress and that one glorious day our resurrection hope will be fulfilled and we shall behold the glory of our Lord face to face.

Hallelujah. Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed. Hallelujah!