

Hallelujah. Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

Please be seated.

You may not be aware of this, but back in my homeland in England, a very notorious crime has just been solved. A man called Joby Pool, a 32-year-old from Telford, has been arrested in connection with a theft of over 200,000 Easter eggs. Over here, we like to think that the Grinch stole Christmas, back in England. Mr. Pool tried to steal Easter. This is not the first time that a theft has been associated with a story of Easter. In fact, the link goes all the way back to the gospels. We're told in the gospel of Matthew that the Roman authorities were worried that Jesus' followers would try and steal his body after he'd been crucified, so they put soldiers outside the tomb to guard it.

They rolled a big stone in front of the tomb and then had soldiers guarding it, but they were no use. Soldiers couldn't stop the resurrection. We are told when the angel appeared, they just shook and looked like dead men. But the soldiers probably thought it all worked out okay for them because this is the last thing we hear about the soldiers. While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priest everything that had happened. After the priest had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers telling them, "You must say, his disciples came by night and stole Jesus away while you were asleep."

There were many people around at Jesus' time who would've liked to think that Jesus' body was stolen, and they tried to start that rumor that Jesus' body was stolen from the tomb, that he wasn't raised from the dead, which prompts me to ask the question, what if that were true? What if Jesus really didn't rise from the dead, the resurrection never happened, that at the heart of our story this morning is not a miracle, but a crime? The children can think about the difference because at the back of the bulletin, you'll see there's a "Spot the difference the resurrection

makes". I said, "Children," I see one or two adults going there, this is just for the children and also might like to see the Easter Garden outside in the courtyard to see what difference Easter makes. But I invite the adults to look with me at our reading from Corinthians that we heard read where Paul poses that identical question of what would life be like if there were no resurrection, if it weren't true, if it hadn't happened.

He asks, how things would look if Christ had not been raised? He writes about the difference that that would make. "If Christ had not been raised," St. Paul says, "Your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we of all people are to be pitied." In other words, it makes a huge difference that Jesus was raised from the dead. If Jesus weren't raised, our faith would be futile, useless, and we would be pitiable. If Jesus were not raised, we would be a people without a lasting hope.

St. Paul says, "We'd be a people with hope for this life only." In other words, it wouldn't be a hope for eternity, it would be more like wishful thinking to get us through this life. Christian hope by contrast, is founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a hope for the ages. It is a hope grounded in reality.

I was listening to the radio this week and I was taken by the CEO a cryonics company who was speaking, talking about his cryonics company, and that's a company which they take quarter of a million from you and freeze you in the hope that at some point in the future medicine will advance far enough that you'll be resuscitated and come back to life.

Now, he did admit that the technology wasn't available yet, and he suggested that it was worth the investment because there was a nought point, naught, naught, naught one chance that at some point in the future, those who are frozen could come back to life. Now, I'm no gambler, but those don't seem like terribly good odds to me, certainly not worth a quarter of a million. Freezing one's body does not seem to me to be a hopeful thing to

do. It's closer to wishing. Christian hope is not based on the off chance that something will happen in the future. Christian hope is based on what has already happened, that Jesus has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who sleep.

Paul goes on to say, in fact, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died, our hope is not for this life only. Because of the resurrection, we have an eternal hope, a hope that lasts beyond the grave, a hope for eternity. We need to hold fast to that hope and to live our lives from that perspective. It's too easy for hope to fade, too easy to lose sight of the hope that is set before us in Jesus Christ. Especially true, I would dare to suggest where we live in La Jolla. Soon after I arrived here, someone told me a joke. Well, it was meant to be a joke. I thought it was more revealing than funny. The joke was about a La Jollan who died and went up to the pearly gates where they were met by St. Peter and St. Peter took, you know, bureaucracy's everywhere, St. Peter took their name, where they lived, how old they were and all that. When the person said, "Oh, I live in La Jolla, California," Peter said, "Well, come on in, but I'm a bit worried that you'll be disappointed by what you find here."

Now, what that story reveals to me is how easy it is for us to be comfortable in this material world, which is so familiar to us. We lose sight of the splendor and the treasure, the glory of the spiritual realm. There was once a young man for whom that wasn't the case. He was young, full of faith, but also afflicted with a terrible disease, and he knew that he only had a few months to live. He called the priest who he knew well, and they started to plan his funeral service right down to the readings, to the hymns, even to what he was going to be wearing, what he was going to be buried in.

Everything was sorted out and the priest was just about to get up and go and he said, oh, there's one more thing. The priest said, "Well, what's that?" The young man said, I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand. The priest said, "Well, that's a rather odd request. Can I ask why that's the case?"

He said, "Yes." He said, "Food is very important in my family, and when we get together for family meals after the main course when the table is being cleared, sometimes my grandmother leans over and whispers in my ear, "Keep your fork." He said that's always a good sign because it means there's something great coming, chocolate cake, deep dish apple pie, he knows the best is yet to come.

He said, "I want to be buried with a fork in my hand, so that when people see that, when I'm in my coffin, I want you to say, when they say, why has he got a fork in his hand? I want you to say, 'Well, that's because he knows the best is yet to come.'" When you go home and eat your Easter day lunch today, look at your fork. Remember, we are a people of hope. We have a hope which is eternal. We have a hope which is based on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Hallelujah. Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed. Hallelujah!