



EASTER LETTER 2021

from

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Holy Week, 2021

Dear Friends,

St Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, 'In all these things *we have complete victory* through him who loved us.' (Letter to the Romans, 8.37)

We have become so used to daily news of the pandemic destroying the lives and security of millions around the world, especially children, that it has become very easy to forget background levels of violence and suffering that seem to increase daily too. And with it the Easter promise of 'victory' feels even harder to believe.

Yet, St Paul doesn't say that we can *hope for* victory but that we *have it*. From what we know of Paul's life, and the instability and inequalities of the world he lived in, it can't have been any easier in his day than it is ours to believe a claim like that. But what he is saying is that there can be *no doubt about God's final purpose in the world*, and so no doubt either for those who put their trust in God. No simple formula will ever be available to individuals, nations or international bodies to stop the sufferings of the present sometimes being appalling and inexplicable. There is only the confidence that what happened in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus declares a truth that no power can conquer and no circumstances can ever stop or frustrate.

God has loved us, and demonstrated that even death cannot limit or prevent him. And, when we realise that fact, ultimately nothing else can shape our minds and hearts. We are anchored in that love, not in the pains of the world. It will not protect us from harm, or from hard decisions, or sacrifices, from emotional turmoil, grief, or anger at the pain of the world, any more than it did for Jesus. But it persuades and assures us that there is finally no contest between God's love and the forces of disintegration in the world and in the human spirit. When the unqualified love of Jesus Christ is denied and abused, even when it is condemned with the utmost arbitrary violence, it proves to be indestructible. The Crucified One is raised to life.

Two things (at the very least) follow. First, if God's love is like this, no one can ever go beyond its reach. No human person is ever *less* than the focus of God's mercy

and forgiveness and grace. And if that is how God sees them, then it is how we must see with the eyes of faith as well: whether it is those who seem to have no human hope, those who do all they can to reject God and his truth, those who understand little or nothing of what the Scriptures tell us of him, those who think they have no need of God. And it is because of this conviction that any person's suffering and oppression is so deeply painful for believers, who cry to God for grace and mercy for them.

And second, if the deepest truth is always this committed and indestructible mercy for human beings, then every act of prayer and compassion and service (even the smallest) is worthwhile, a way of making the truth known, and serving God's kingdom. It becomes part of the current of truth turning our lives towards the Risen Christ, and against the sin and injustices of a world in which pleasure, success and security threaten to override everything. How clearly this comes out in the courage of those Christian minorities around the world who continue their worship and service in the face of daily threats and attacks; and how powerful a testimony they are to the reality of the resurrection of the Son of God.

The victory is won. However terrible the suffering and conflicts of our lives may be, the truth of God's inexhaustible life is not in danger of defeat. Jesus has given his risen life as the basis of our trust and hope in God, and that trust and hope is what we can show in our words and our deeds as Christian people – and in our willingness to do those small acts of faith, hope and love that bring no reward but show the world the character and will of God as it has been revealed *once and for all* in the Cross and Resurrection of the Lord.

I wish you every blessing and joy in the weeks from Easter to Pentecost, and in all that lies ahead.

Christ, our hope, has truly risen!

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "+ Jonathan Bissell". The plus sign is at the beginning, followed by the name "Jonathan" in a cursive script, and "Bissell" in a more stylized, slightly larger cursive script.