

On one of my days off last Week, I tackled a plot of bramble and thorns, laid some mulch and bark. At the end of a long gardening session – seeing my wounds: on my wrists and arms and legs and a slice out of my ear, with dirt on my face and earth on my hands and under my nails,

I thought again, no wonder Mary Magdalen mistook the Risen Lord for a gardener!

Many have found comfort and companionship in the earthiness of our gardens and allotments during this past year.

There is something about being in touch with the earth, quite literally, which is restorative; the earth becomes a place of retreat, of peace and harmony.

The Church hasn't always seen the earth as a place of healing and salvation, more often we have looked to escape from

the good earth into a spiritual realm, which we often call heaven: where there will be a great banquet, fruiting trees, awash with milk and honey.... to be harvested and enjoyed without toil or labour. The great escape of heaven.

During lockdown, many of us have escaped the mundane, into a virtual world of our own creation.

I call it Zoomland, but it may be skype, facetime, google-classroom or teams that have kept you in touch with family and friends, school lessons, Doctor's, colleagues and PCC meetings.

Like the imaginary heaven, the advantage of this virtual realm is it promises us a different place. Through our computer screen we slip into another world and at the click of a mouse, we escape into another, and if we become bored we can slip into another world...going deeper and deeper into a virtual reality.

As my barber said to me, it's as if we have all been living in separate, parallel universes.

Just as an escapist heaven is poor theology for a church like ours, likewise, despite the blessings of the virtual world, it, as its name implies, is no alternative to the real thing.

You can be just as lonely in a zoom-room as you can be in crowded hall. It is abnormal to gather individually, in the comfort of our own home, comparing the offerings of different churches, whilst ignoring the cries of the earth.

This, is why the resurrection of Jesus is such an earthy, bodily, real thing –why He rose with earth on his hands.

Christ does not appear to his disciples a ghostly apparition, a spiritual being from another virtual world...He shows real scars, a head pierced by thorns and briars, earth beneath his fingernails, wounds that *can* be touched.

In our Gospel passage, Christ has a real hunger which can be satisfied with real fish.

This embodiment of the Resurrected Christ is so important on this Earth Sunday.

Earth Sunday is made up by the churches, alerting members to the approach of Earth Day (which is observed on 22 April). Earth Day, the largest secular observation in the world, marked by a billion plus people, a day of action to change human behaviour, to create global, national, and local policies.

On Earth Sunday, as we recall that it was in the real world that the earthy Christ was resurrected, we have ringing in our ears:

- The prophecies of Isaiah which look forward to the renewal of creation.

- The words of the Exsultet: Night truly blessed, when peace and justice find a home, and heaven is wedded to earth and all creation is reconciled to you.
- The coming Rogation Days when we give thanks for the renewed earth, this good earth, our home.

It is here on earth that we see signs of and rejoice in the Kingdom of Heaven. We might go as far as to say, the Kingdom of Heaven isn't "in heaven" but here on earth.

Just as God commissioned the first earthlings to care for the earth, so the risen Christ, becoming an earthling to raise the children of earth, recommissions us to care for the earth.

That is why

- we as at St George's are committed to being an Eco Church

- our children are out this morning planting flowers and getting earth on their hands
- we believe the body is good and holy, that matter matters
- we are called to care for creation and all God's creatures.

God does not want us to flee into a virtual or spiritual “otherworldly” realm; God wants us to stay and be focussed on the core activities of discipleship...to feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, heal the sick and free the oppressed. And that includes a hungry, thirsty, and sick earth...which if we listen, we hear creation groaning, longing for God's freedom.

On this Earth Sunday, we listen again to the earth – that place of healing and salvation (which must be anxious as humans start to emerge from lockdown); we pray for the

good earth; and in solidarity with the late Duke of Edinburgh we commit or recommit ourselves to being good stewards of creation.