

Easter people
Bible reading: Acts 1.1-12

*Jesus said: You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you:
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth.*

It's very strange — but I think I've heard more about Easter this year on radio and TV than ever before. It's as if the world has suddenly woken up — in the middle of a global pandemic, as the death toll rises — to the realisation that the message of Easter is precisely what the world needs to hear. Easter's message of hope and rebirth somehow resonates all the more powerfully, more starkly, from empty churches and piazzas around the globe. And it's not the jolly bits that people are hungry for, the chocolates and the Easter bunnies. The Easter hope — the hope we all need — is a hope that can face up to death, that can share the pain and vulnerability of the human condition, and come through it victorious — right through death and out into new life. "Victory over this virus is some way off, but victory over death is already achieved."

That was Malcolm Guite, writing in the *Church Times* on Good Friday. He goes on: "Yes, we shall keep Easter, and not in spite of these things, but because of them: for it was into the cruellest of Aprils that Christ came to find and save us. ... At this strange Easter, we will discover that he is not lost somewhere in our locked churches, any more than he was sealed in the sepulchre. He is up and out and risen, long before us. He is at much at work in the world as the spring is at work in the blossoms. This Easter, the Risen Christ, who might have been a wafer in the hands of the priest, will be strength in the hands of the nurse, a blessing in the hands of the carer. He goes with them to their work as surely as he came to us in our church."

Today we start a new series of *Thought for the Day* based on the book of Acts. I'm challenging you to join me and Robin and Rod in reading through the whole book, section by section, and discovering what God has to teach us from this story of what it means to be God's Easter people, living in the light of Jesus' resurrection. Like Jesus' disciples, we don't know what the future will hold. We're desperately looking for signs of restoration (*Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?*). We have to be content with not knowing when the peak will come, or when the lockdown will be lifted (v.7). Like them, we can't yet envisage the future into which God is leading us. We just have to live faithfully, from day to day.

But (like them) we have a promise: *you shall receive power from on high* (v.8): think of Ezekiel's vision of God's Spirit breathing life into the scattered bones of God's people (Ezekiel 37). We have a task: *you shall be my witnesses ...* to keep telling the Easter story, to keep allowing Jesus' aliveness to bring us to new birth — individually and as a community. And we have a presence: a Lord in heaven, absent in body, but with us in new and surprising ways which we have yet to discover. Welcome to the journey!

God bless, Loveday

Lord, as we step out into your future, fill us with your Easter life: help us to know your presence, and empower us to be your witnesses: in Jesus' name, Amen.

