

EASTER WEDNESDAY

The Harling Christ by Maz Jackson



“To believe in the risen Jesus is to trust that the transformational power of God is active in the human world, available and relevant to every situation.”

Rowan Williams

Prayer

Risen Jesus,
we place along your outstretched arms
the ill and dying and bereaved,
the isolated and anxious,
the traumatised and exhausted:
undergird them all, we pray,
and bring your risen gold
into the wounds they carry. Amen

... all will be made alive in Christ. 1 Cor 15.22b

Pay a visit to the parish church in East Harling, South Norfolk, and you will come across the vibrantly colourful painting pictured here. It's by the Norfolk artist Maz Jackson and was dedicated in 2012. Like so many in Norfolk, St Peter and St Paul East Harling is a 'wool' church, built from the wealth of the trade around it. The little lamb in the basket brings this mediaeval past to mind but the way it looks up at the central Christ-figure also makes us think of "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world", that round green world on which the basket is set.

St Peter (left) and St Paul (right), standing on the spring grass, also look up at the dazzling figure of Jesus, and all the way along his wide-spread arms stand other disciples – St Andrew is particularly easy to identify, the saltire cross of his martyrdom behind him.

What do we see as we gaze at this painting in the context of coronavirus?

Though the painting is joyous and pulses with life, each palm of Jesus' huge outstretched hands bears a horrific hole. There has clearly been terrible suffering. Gleaming discs, however, now fill these holes: brutal nails have turned to gold. And the arms of the crucified and risen one go on and on, endless in their capacity to carry others in their own terrible trials.

The lovely thing about the lamb, the squirrel (the heraldic emblem of East Harling's Lord of the Manor) and the basket made of Norfolk rush is that it brings the Resurrection right into our region. But at the same time as this Christ is intensely local, he also encompasses nothing less than the whole globe on which he stands. During this pandemic, his arms are long enough, strong enough to undergird those in the slums of India, or the refugee camps of Gaza or the lonely cities of Lombardy...