

Easter Sunday: John: 20:1-18; Acts 10:34-43

Wednesday of Easter Week: Psalm 105; Matt. 28.16-end

We are now entering our third week of lockdown ... locked in ... locked out! And with no light on the horizon yet as to when restrictions will be lifted. A difficult and bewildering time for all of us. The stability of life has been unpicked and there is a very real threat to our own health and life and those whom we love and care for. We are not able to hold, to gather, to offer tenderness or touches of kindness to each other at this time. The people and places where we would normally turn to at such a disaster would be friends and family and our church ... being locked in, locked out, locked down prevents all of these healing and comforting ways.

As a priest to you I am also caught up in these events so I am struggling too. Finding myself disorientated, disconnected, perplexed, uncertain of the future ... when will all this end? It is easy to offer false hope to you ... it'll all be ok, you'll be fine, everything will get back to normal soon, it's just a bad case of the flu. Or to get wrapped up in the victory of the Easter story and the resurrection triumph ... offering platitudes of Christian triumphalism; that every bad story must be redeemed. Neither of these approaches honour what we really know and understand of the truth of the Gospel message, the good news of Jesus Christ. The joy that we experience this Eastertide will be mixed with sadness and tears. We are free in Christ yet we are locked in ... locked out ... locked down. So our spirits are crushed within us. It takes courage for us to witness to this. We like our stories to have a happy-ever-after ending. So to have to face awfulness and terror is challenging for us and we like Peter in the Gospel accounts would rather deny Christ, than witness to him.

It was at the break of day that the cock crowed and Peter realized what he had done, how he had let down his friend and turned his back on him, because what confronted him was too difficult, too painful, too costly. The analogy Jesus gives us of new life is that 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit' (John 12.24). There needs to be a breaking down in order for new life to come. The breaking down is always painful. We are now living through a collective trauma, a collective breaking down and it is as we face honestly these dreadful circumstances and acknowledge how we feel that we find ourselves as true witnesses and authentic disciples within the Gospel story.

The end of the story was not the death, or that dreadful Holy Saturday when everything was empty and void of life. But the story continued, just as this is not the end of the story for us. But the story continues in a way that will be different and unrecognizable from what has gone before. What emerges after all of this will be unrecognizable from the life we had before. Mary did not recognize Jesus ... she thought him to be a gardener. In the same way when we eventually come through all of this we too and those around us will be changed.

***Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.***

(From the song 'Anthem' by Leonard Cohen)

Over the past few months I have been reflecting on the Japanese art of *kintsugi* as a helpful metaphor for when we are faced with challenge and adversity. It is a recognition that nothing is ever truly broken in life. It is based on the art of mending broken pottery and taking the broken edges and lacquering them with gold so that the reformed pot is more valuable than the original. It is marked by where the breaks have been, but these breaks are now transformational in that they are of higher value as they have been honoured by being lacquered with gold. There is a wisdom, which underpins this in that it is through challenge and adversity that we may be refined and made more purposeful ... the parallel here with the story of the resurrection of Jesus

Christ is clear to us. If this is true with our personal lives and spiritual discipleship it is also true with the life of our Church. How long has the Church been locked in and locked out distant from the world, concerned only for its own survival and means. Could this time also mark the beginning of a new Church and new people of God. People who know their brokenness and vulnerability but people who also know of the living hope and grace found in Jesus Christ. People who have courage to be witnesses in the world and be transformative agents bringing in hope and healing.

This Easter will be the strangest Easter experience we have ever known! We are locked in, locked down and locked out. But in the locking in and locking down there is also a breaking through of a tender vulnerable love. This love has gone before us and has already been refined through the furnace of death so that we can trust the life and hope and light it offers. There is as a crack of light in everything that's how the light gets in.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed Alleluia!

Collect for Easter Sunday

God of Glory,
By the raising of your Son
You have broken the chains of death and hell:
Fill your Church with faith and hope;
For a new day has dawned
And the way to life stands open
In our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Notices

Response to the social impact of CV19. St Mary's have begun to be a centre for emergency food distribution. Volunteer drivers are needed, as are people who can phone people to find out their needs. Please contact Graham Duncan if you are able to help, email: graham.duncan@stmarys-church.co.uk

Keeping Faith & Celebrating Easter in our Homes

Maundy Thursday – a reflection for the meal we share on our own or in our households

Good Friday - a time to pray, we gather collectively from 1-2pm and share a reflection

Easter Day - at dawn the Easter Candle will be lit by Claire for all of us if you are awake you can join me and light your own Easter Candle. 10.30am we collectively gather to celebrate and reflect on the joy of Easter.

Jem Clines will also be offering zoom services, which act as an addition to the above offerings. Please don't feel you have to do any of the above, they are there as an offering. You might just need to eat chocolate and stay in bed! Hoping and praying your Easter is meaningful and life giving.

Revd. Claire Dawson cdawson@blueyonder.co.uk 0114 272 4987: Day off Friday

Karen Cribb revkaren@stmaryschurch.co.uk 0114 262 1876 Mobile: 07580378507: Day off Tuesday

Rev. Cannon Mike West mike.west23@tiscali.co.uk 0114 2662188

Rev. Dr. Ela Hall 0114 268 7002 elanutuhall@gmail.com

Centralmissionpartnership@sheffield.anglican.org Catherine Rooker-Brown: 0739 2087529

The Lighting of the Easter Candle

*Christ yesterday and today,
The beginning and the end,
Alpha and Omega,
All time belongs to him,
And all ages;
To him be glory and power,
Through every age and for ever.
By his holy and glorious wounds
May Christ our Lord guard and keep us.
May the light of Christ, rising in glory,
Banish all darkness from our hearts and
minds.
The light of Christ.
Thanks be to God.*