**Easter Sunday Sermon All Saints 2023 (A)**

Outside my study window is a bird box that we put up a couple of years ago. Around this time, I keep a keen eye on it, for any signs of the blue tits returning. No signs yet! But for me, it is one of those quiet signs of creation resurrecting itself that we are privileged to witness in this part of the world around Easter.

Beautiful as such examples and stories are, I don’t think they have a great deal to do with Christ’s resurrection that we celebrate today. Our tendency towards reducing complex theological concepts to simple examples from nature is entirely understandable. Not least because as I wrote this, I was watching a blackbird working hard building a nest in the hedge opposite my study window! The temptations are legion!

There is so much more to Holy Week than the annual re-birth of creation. If our thinking is stuck there, we are really not too far away from reducing Easter to bunny rabbits, chicks and chocolate.

What are the events of Easter all about?

This is the point at which I am quite content to admit to the frailty of my own understanding and the reality of my own doubts.

I am convinced however, that to explore the theology of Easter Day we must first explore Holy Week – all the events from Palm Sunday to Easter Day.

It was quite a remarkable week.

Last Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem in a pre-planned donkey excursion that looks like an unsubtle ridiculing of the Roman authorities. They too would have entered Jerusalem for the Passover festival that day, but on massive horses surrounded by soldiers and all the pomp of the ruling invaders. Here we see Jesus in both provocative and humble mood. His supporters were jubilant!

Monday saw Jesus in the temple angrily overturning the tables of the money changes, only on Tuesday to be found preaching forgiveness to his disciples, almost as if he had a guilty conscience. On Wednesday the disciples witnessed a woman anoint Jesus with fragrant oil in a simple act of generosity that hinted at the burial anointing to come. That simple act of faith still guides our practice of anointing today. The following night, we’re at Thursday now, Jesus wraps himself in a towel and washes his disciples feet. Jesus gives us the clear instruction to become servants for others, washing the feet of all. Simultaneously, he gives us the gift of himself in broken, poured and shared bread and wine, a further hint of the fractured, bleeding body of the following day’s traumatic events.

By mid-afternoon Friday the disciples were confused, exhausted, fearful and scattered as their hero was brought low by being raised high on a cross.

Saturday sees them spending the day in wretched, isolated, grief, unbearably distraught at the failure of all their hopes. Low doesn’t describe their mood. Here is darkness beyond imagining; everything they lived and hoped for destroyed in a few merciless, selfish hours of cowardice and fun, executed by mercenaries in the spirit of the nonchalant and thoughtless soldiers they appear to have been.

But everything changes at dawn.

And in the remarkable events told again in our gospel reading, despair turns to joy. Jesus has conquered death itself.

As your reflect on the events of that first Easter, here are a few themes you might like to mull over.

The first is the foolishness of God. By which I don’t mean to suggest that God is foolish, quite the opposite. God does things in ways that are foolish in the eyes of the world. Why risk the death of God on a cross? Only a God with phenomenal trust and faith in humanity would be so daring as to risk the end of the entire enterprise of the incarnation. God trusted the disciples to grasp the game plan and come Easter morning – they did. Look out for the foolishness of God in your life; he might be calling you to act contrary to the accepted ways of the world.

Secondly, the humour of God. The women left the angel laughing aloud – of course this is how it was going to turn out all the time. Why couldn’t we see it! Despite everything the disciples had purported to believe, when push came to shove, they hadn’t believed. Their Good Friday grief was the grief of ignorance, faithlessness and a lack of courage. It took the experience of utter despair transformed by the angel to turn that around. Look out for the humour of God in your life and in the life of the church. Jesus laughs with us. Expect the unexpected. Our God is of this world and of the Kingdom too. Expect to be surprised by faith.

Thirdly, never forget the pain of the cross for therein lies the divine. God hung there dying and hangs with us too through all of our trials and tribulations, however minor, however catastrophic. The crucifixion proves there are no parameters or restrictions on God’s presence or God’s love. There is nothing God hasn’t experienced before. God dwells in the darkness as well as the light and in both, his love is poured out for us, unconditionally, unending, even, uninvited.

And it’s with that last thought that I’m going to end. God’s love enters our lives uninvited, un-named, un-acknowledged. It simply is.

Thankfully the church doesn’t own God. God works through the church, but, if we’re really honest, mostly beyond it. All we’re trying to do as Christians is connect with the divine and encourage others to journey with us as intrepid, if tentative, spiritual explorers. There’s no doctrine here to sign up to other than a desire to love God more.

There is no Easter Day without Good Friday and there is no day after Easter Day without remembering that Good Friday continues daily around the world in the life struggles of millions and millions of people. And it is to the needs of the world that people of the resurrection turn, knowing that in the company of the imaginative, reckless, laughing, loving God we have all that we need to bring hope to those most marginalised by the brutality of life through simple acts of love.

At the end of this service may we live our words of dismissal, leaving in peace to love and serve the Lord, his people, his creation; may we be faithful, hopeful and courageous. Amen.