

Easter Morning April 2020

Whichever of the Gospel's you read – and they all have their own perspectives on that first Easter Sunday morning – the common element is lives are changed -the people who we meet early in the morning are very different just a few hours later.

On that first Easter day lives were changed because Jesus had risen from the dead. And because he has risen from the dead he is still changing lives today:

This morning we will reflect that he brings

Hope in despair

Hope in death

Hope in life

Hope in despair

Apart from the most determined Eeyore's (or Marvin's if you are a fan of the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy) most of us have the capacity to cling on to some vestige of hope even in the most desperate of situations. At the more trivial end this is the norm for York City supporters – so often staring at defeat or disappointment yet never completely letting go of the possibility of a miraculous turn around. Recently I heard an incredibly moving interview with woman whose husband was on intensive care with Covid-19 - first his kidneys had stopped working and then his other organs had started shutting down. The doctors had told her he now had no chance of surviving, they had expected him to die on the Monday and he was still alive at the time of the interview on Wednesday. Her words

were accepting that he was going to die at any point but her voice betrayed that somewhere deep down she had not given up hope.

On Easter Sunday – as dawn approaches - I find myself speculating what was going on in the minds of the women stumbling through the dark to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. Their hopes and dreams had been pinned on Jesus and what he was going to accomplish – they had been absolutely loyal to him – even staying at the foot of the cross when most disciples had deserted and gone into hiding. All this had now ended and all that was left was to finish the burial process. But, was there still some vestige of hope? Were they recalling that Jesus had spoken of life beyond his death? Was there something, even in the darkness, which promised light?

On this Easter morning, as never before in my years in ministry, I have to recognise that there are many who are not yet ready for Easter Sunday. Those who are dangerously unwell, those who are grieving, those who are lonely or fearful in isolation or isolated with an abuser, those whose jobs or businesses are in jeopardy. There will be many who remain in the despair of Good Friday, for whom the hope of a positive future is too remote to hang on to yet. At the same time, recognising that the pandemic has yet to reach its peak in this country, there will be many of us who may find ourselves unexpectedly plunged into our despair and grief in the weeks to come.

The Easter promise of “It’s Friday but Sunday’s coming!” may sound glib and easy, but it has its origin in the costliest sacrifice God could have made for us. The Friday was the agonising death of Jesus on the cross. Whatever Friday experience we may be experiencing we can turn to God who went through

unjust and undeserved suffering to bring you and me into the light of his love.

Today you may be ready for Easter – but, if not, the women at dawn invite you to allow that think of hope that for you it might still be Friday, and it might be Friday for some time – but Sunday is coming. You don't have to understand what Sunday will look like for you, or how you can get there – but we remember today that Sunday is guaranteed.

Hope in death

An active Christian lady was seriously ill and preparing to die – she discussed her funeral arrangements with her vicar. One thing she particularly wanted is that she should laid to rest with a fork in her hand. When the vicar enquired about it she said that at church functions when the first course was finished – those who were clearing up would frequently say. “Keep your fork” and then she knew that something better was coming – some cream or other delicious pudding. The fork in her hand was a sign that she knew that death was not the end but something even better was to come. Because of Easter we can face death with our fork in our hands.

Hope in life

This lockdown period is, for many, a chance to catch up on reading. I wonder what sort of books you have chosen? For me, it usually biography – or autobiography. I love finding out about the person behind the public persona. However, the best a book can offer is to tell mw more about someone – I may have read their book and know about them but I can't say I

know them Following Jesus is not just about reading about him in his book – because of Easter he is present with us. We don't just know about the man **because** of his book – we know the man **behind** the book. He walks with us – giving us the strength, guidance and love we need.

The resurrection which we celebrate today made a difference in the first century – it makes a difference today. It brought hope to those in despair, it brought hope to those facing death or bereavement and it brought hope of a new relationship with the God who loves us. Can I invite you now to just take a few moments to ask how your life will be different today because Jesus is alive?

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

May Christ,
who out of defeat brings new hope and a new future,
fill you with his new life;
and the blessing ...