



“He...sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:45)

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick...I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.” (Matthew 9:12,13)

The Esigodini part of Zimbabwe at the very least is celebrating the best rainy season for a number of years. Even before 90 mm last night, as I write, we reckoned we were doing well. In chapel a couple of weeks ago we were encouraged to continue praying for rain and, importantly, to thank God for the rain we have already received. Let us do that. The rains may be all but over but it would be good to take time to offer our thanks for this rain. Wherever you may be reading this, never forget to give thanks to God for his goodness in so many ways.

However the Bible tells us that the rain falls on both the righteous and the unrighteous. Rain is a blessing to everyone, whether they are a Christian or not. And that brings me on to Easter, the Christian celebration that marks the start of April this year. Jesus died for everyone. Whether we think they

deserve salvation and eternal life or not, everyone is important to Jesus. Consequently that means that they should be important to us. It is not up to us to decide who should be, who is worth of being, a Christian or not, we should declare Christ's good news of salvation to all, fulfilling his instruction to his followers to go and make disciples. This Easter would be a good time to do that!

A RESURRECTION PEOPLE

At Easter we saw Mary Magdalene, deep in grief and loss, find the tomb of Jesus empty. The risen Christ then asked her a question that we still hear addressed to ourselves today: 'Who are you looking for?'

Mary had dared to believe that this Jesus was a life-saver. And now he was dead. She goes to the tomb expecting nothing other than an ending – death. But when she looks into it she is confronted by the bewilderment of surprise and that awkward question: “Who are you looking for?”

Jesus is his disciple to face the truth about herself. Finding the corpse of Jesus, would, at the very least, confirm her experience of the world. Instead however, she is invited to open her eyes to a different future. She is invited to glimpse a radically different world in which death does not have the final word and which God is heard to whisper into the heart of loss the words “Let there be light.”

The invitation extends beyond Mary to the church of Jesus Christ today. We are invited to ‘look differently’, to dare to see the potential that God calls us to in a world which, by its newness, challenges our comforts and familiarities.

We face many challenges in the months and years to come but, we can do this with faith (in God, the Gospel and one another), with hope (in the God who raised Christ from the dead – and not in a familiar formula), and with love (for the God, the church and those we serve). At the heart of all we say and do

there must be the rhythm of Easter newness that refuses to collude with the mantras of those who see only endings deaths.

We are a resurrection people. I pray that together we can live this out in our life together as we discover that there is joy in the surprise that comes from learning to look in a different place.

+Nick Baines
Bishop of Leeds

IF EASTER BE NOT TRUE

If Easter be not true,
Then all the lilies low must lie;
The Flounders poppies fade and die:
The spring must lose her fairest bloom
For Christ were still in the tomb –
If Easter be not true

If Easter be not true,
Then faith must mount on broken wing;
Then hope no more immortal spring;
Then love must lose her mighty urge;
Life prove a phantom death or dirge –
If Easter be not true

If Easter be not true
‘Twere foolishness the cross to bear;
He died in vain who suffered there;
What matter though we laugh or cry,
Be good or evil, we live or die,
If Easter not be true?
If Easter be not true,
But it is true, and Christ is risen!

And mortal spirit from its prison
Of sin and death with him may rise!
Worthwhile the struggle, sure the prize,
Since Easter, aye is true!

Henry H Barstow

JUDAS AND CHRIST

Why did Judas betray Christ? It's a question that worries me every year. Was it just for money? Thirty pieces of silver was not very much for such a deed. Had he stopped believing in Christ? Then why didn't he just go away? The most likely possibility seems to me that he thought he could force Christ into responding to violence with violence and so show himself to be the Messiah, the King of Israel who would drive out the Romans. He was wrong. He got things terribly wrong. When he saw that he was filled with remorse and despair and hanged himself.

Yet Judas was necessary. Jesus said that himself. (Matt. 26: 24) What he did was wrong but somehow Jesus had to be handed over to be crucified if he was to save humankind from sin and offer us eternal life. The Cross itself was necessary. It was utterly wrong, probably the most evil deed ever done in the history of the world, crucifying the innocent Son of God. Yet it was needed to bring us eternal life.

Judas got it wrong, and we get it wrong. Our betrayal of Jesus is not as spectacular, but we do it in our sins, in our faithlessness, in the many ways we forget about Christ and all his teaching. We have to be honest and admit that we too betray the Jesus we have come to know and love. What can we do about it? We can be sorry, and say so, and try to do better. Yet there are two other factors of the Resurrection which can help us to take this more seriously:

1. Jesus is alive, and walks with us in our daily life. We don't see him, or we don't recognise him. Several of the Resurrection stories show the disciples not recognising Jesus. If we can remember all the time that Jesus is walking with us, we will be much less likely to betray him. This doesn't make Jesus a kind of policeman instilling fear into us. We should be delighted to have the wonderful Jesus walking along with us in life. Let's get to know him better.

2. The stakes for us Christians are very high. Christ offers us the most wonderful reward for following him: eternal life. Not just eternal life, but eternal life with Him and His Father in this place called Heaven which will be the most wonderful place there can ever be. Do we think about that often? I fear not! If we did we would find it easy to avoid sin, to keep our minds on Jesus and not forget his teaching. Not only that, but fear of death, fear of Covid, fear of cancer would fade away. We would not fear death. We would look forward to it with hope and joy. We would be like St Paul and say, "To die is gain....I desire to depart and be with Christ; which is far better." (Phil. 1: 21,23) If we don't (and I admit, I don't) we haven't thought enough about the Resurrection. That's what we must do over these next few weeks of Easter - try to make eternal life with Jesus part of our lives.

And Judas? We believe Jesus went down to Hell from the Cross. When he got there did he find Judas weeping with the terrible realisation of what he had done, begging for forgiveness? If so, did he forgive him? Jesus loved Judas, and Jesus' love never dies. When he came out of Hell, dragging Adam and Eve and the souls of the righteous with him, I suspect Judas may have been there, too. When we get to heaven and meet Christ we must not be surprised to see Judas already there. He betrayed Jesus, but so do we. We are sinners together, but forgiven sinners ready to enjoy life with God.

Nicolas Stebbing CR
From The Bell, Christchurch, Borrowdale

Knee polishing

The challenge to pray

As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. 1 Samuel 12:23

Most of us would agree that prayer is important so why is our prayer life not what it should be? If we truly understand the privilege that bringing our concerns to God is, then prayer would be a delight. In reality, prayer often seems to be a chore. In the busyness of life, taking time out to pray – when we could be working – is a challenge.

Don Carson says that “one of the basic demonstrations that we know God is prayer – spiritual, persistent, biblically minded prayer.” If we want to take the task of representing Christ in [the world] seriously, we cannot do it without praying. Helmfried Riecker suggests reasons why we don't pray

I don't think I need to;

I am too tired.

God does not answer.

It achieves nothing.

I can decide for myself without any help.

I cannot pray; I am too sinful.

I can't pray about such trivial things when there are so many problems in the world.

God knows what I need, so why waste time praying

St. Francis de Sales (1567 - 1622) former Bishop of Geneva was once asked how much one should pray. He replied that you should pray a half hour each day unless you're busy. If you're busy, you should pray an hour.

Sometimes we feel too “spiritually dry” or far from God to pray.

Ironically it is on those days, more than any other that we need to pray!

Keep a prayer journal where you note who you prayed for and what you prayed for. It can be a great encouragement to look back and see how God has been at work and also a challenge to keep investing in and praying for people and not giving up on them.

Stuart Weir www.veritesport.org

Hopefully we are feeling inspired to pray and my feeling is that we should once again be praying for the world around us. Inevitably, conflict is caused by hatred and a desire for revenge. Jesus said we should pray for those who persecute us, forgive those who sin against us. His death and resurrection give us the power to do so. Pray for that power around the world.

Sunday : pray for unity in the Christian church, that its members and leaders will speak God's voice into situations of conflict

Pray for peace in the following wars

Monday : Ukraine and Russia

Tuesday : the Middle East

Wednesday : the ongoing civil war in Sudan

Thursday : pray for the political situation in Zimbabwe concerning the proposed constitutional changes

And two ever-present world challenges

Friday : refugees, migrants and (illegal) immigration

Saturday : people trafficking and slavery

CUT SHORT

A minister known for his lengthy sermons, noticed a man in the congregation get up and leave for a period of the service. After church the minister asked him where he had gone. "To get a haircut," the man replied. "But," said the minister, "Why didn't you do that before the service?"

"Because," the man explained, "I didn't need a haircut then!"

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