

Sermon for Online Service: Pott Shrigley 12 April 2020

Easter Day

So we have finally arrived, via Holy Week and Good Friday, at Easter Day. A day of victory, of hope, of course: but this hope only means something if we have first glimpsed the darkness and despair of Holy Week – a despair which must have been total for those first followers of Jesus, around the time of his arrest, execution and burial.

I hope you were able to mark Holy Week this year. If you were, and you took time to remember the awful story of Jesus' suffering and death, you might be surprised if I tell you that, even in those terrible events there were signs of the hope which we celebrate today.

For instance, when Jesus met with his friends for supper the night before he died, the atmosphere must have been saturated with dread and foreboding. Jesus spoke openly of what was to take place the following day. But, in the midst of that meal, he did something unexpected; he took bread, and wine, and gave what must, at first, have seemed simply a gruesome foretaste of the horrific death which lay ahead of him: 'this is my blood, poured out; my body, broken'.

But, even as the disciples must have winced at the thought of Jesus' body being broken, his blood spilt, he added words which transformed this action from a dire prediction of death, into an assurance of hope and life. 'This is my blood', yes, but also, 'this cup is the new covenant'. A covenant; a guarantee; a promise. A promise of a new relationship with God – a relationship marked by forgiveness, and by the assurance of eternal life.

We celebrate and recognise that today, Easter Day, in the resurrection; but that covenant, that promise, was already there on Good Friday; sealed with Jesus blood.

And what symbol can I use for Good Friday itself? The cross, certainly. But one of our members suggested one of these – a hot cross bun: Reg shared in a text message yesterday, ‘eat your bun this Easter – but don’t forget the cross’. Then Audrey chimed in; the pastry cross on the buns, she said, is made without yeast, so it doesn’t rise. The rest of the bun does rise, because it contains yeast.

Audrey’s right. Even in this symbol on Good Friday, there were signs of hope in the midst of despair. That bun, round like the stone which was rolled away from the tomb; that sweetness, of the fruit and the shiny top, like the sweetness and light of hope which shines on Easter morning; that yeast, acting like the Spirit of God, bringing resurrection and new life – to Jesus first, but then to all those who will trust and follow him.

The message of Easter is not just that one day there may be a happy ending, if you can just get through. The message is that the hope, joy and peace which we recognise today, is actually there even at the lowest, darkest, most desperate moments – because they were there even in the despair and pain of Good Friday.

Well, you may or may not like hot cross buns; and indeed, Christians vary in just how important it feels to them physically to share in the bread and wine of communion – although I know that some will find missing it this Easter very painful. But one thing which is the same for all of us is that, in the midst of pain, despair, uncertainty, grief, and fear – God is there giving us reminders of his hope. However deep a pit we sink into – and there’s never been a deeper pit than the first good Friday – God’s love is deeper.

How do we know – really know – that? The cross, and the empty tomb together are all the proof you need.