

## **Easter Day**

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Revd Tim Barker, at the parish church of St Andrew Guernsey on Easter Day, 21 April 2019

*Readings: Acts 1 vv 34-43 and Luke 24 vv 1-12*

We seem to have a problem about forgiveness. Whether that is forgiving people who have offended us or whether it's accepting the possibility that we can be forgiven for mistakes we have made, forgiveness seems to be a rather significant problem for many people. Of course, forgiving serious offences is difficult. Yet many people are easily offended by comments on social media.

Social media can be a force for good, allowing easier connection to people in different parts of the world. But it is disturbing that people can take offence at comments which may not be directly related to them, and whether or not they are in full possession of the facts. Forgiveness is rarely evident. And when there is no forgiveness, there is simply corrosion and destruction, what is solid is eaten away and we are left damaged.

This last week, Holy Week, is a week where we see the consequences of anger and offence and manipulation. The players in the drama of the night of Maundy Thursday and the early hours of Good Friday leave us in no doubt about this. Judas' betrayal of Jesus, perhaps out of disappointment that Jesus did not turn out to be what he had hoped and expected. Peter, cock-sure about his commitment to Jesus and yet unable to admit his relationship with Jesus, when it mattered. The political machinations of the establishment. Pilate's unwillingness to defend Jesus in the face of local political pressure. The indifference and ingratitude of the crowd.

And yet all of this comes together on the cross, where Jesus can say, 'It is finished.' The drama of the incarnation has drawn to a close in this moment. The body Jesus received from a human mother breathed its last breath. At the same time, the work Jesus came to do is completed. It is accomplished. It is finished. It is the moment of victory, which changes everything. The slate is wiped clean.

Forgiveness is right at the heart of the Christian faith. It's our understanding of forgiveness that distinguishes Christianity from other religious faiths. Christians believe, in wonder and amazement, that we are reconciled with God; not because we deserve it, but because of Jesus' willing sacrifice of himself on the cross. This changes everything.

And if we are forgiven, not because of our own efforts or because we think that we deserve it, but because of God's generosity, we have a responsibility to be agents of reconciliation in every aspect of our lives.

I should seek to model forgiveness and reconciliation. When I don't, when I struggle to offer or receive forgiveness, I know that relationships suffer and I am not being an authentic witness to something that is at the heart of my faith: that I am loved and forgiven, not because I deserve it, but because God loves me.

We are precious; we are unique and valuable. That, I believe, is how God sees us. All who love us see us in just the same way. Accepting this does wonders for our mental and physical wellbeing.

On Easter Day Christians proclaim, with all our heart, that God honoured Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and that Jesus is alive and remains for ever the perfect channel between human beings and God.

As we see Jesus, so we see God himself. When we know the deep and selfless love of Jesus, we can glimpse the truth that God loves and values each one of us. Easter Day is a day that proclaims that new life is possible. Easter brings a sense of meaning and purpose that cannot be matched by anything else.

In the silence of Holy Saturday, while normal life went on, God was at work. Amazingly. Wonderfully. In ways that words cannot express. So much so that when the women came to the tomb early on the Sunday morning, they found the empty tomb. Initially they were stunned. No wonder the disciples did not believe what seemed to be a fanciful and absurd story – all of this dismissed as 'an idle tale' as Luke describes the disciples' snap judgement. There must have been some other explanation. But something made Peter check it out. And he was amazed.

Gradually, over the coming weeks, Jesus' disciples began to understand the truth that Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday was not the end. They had encounters with Jesus that left them in no doubt that he was alive. Different, certainly. Not always immediately recognisable. But very much alive.

They learned that none of the forces of evil could prevent God's love breaking through into his world. God breaks into the normal routine and offers hope and purpose. And, yes, they had to cope with their failures and accept the amazing reality of God's forgiveness.

As we have seen Jesus, through our own experience and through the eyes of the gospel writers, we have had a precious glimpse of God, alive and active in his world and wanting us to bask and rejoice in love that we can scarcely imagine.

Our churches are communities of sinners who recognise that we need continually to seek God's forgiveness, so that we, in turn, can be agents of love, reconciliation and hope in a world that seems so eaten up with bitterness and suspicion. When we accept that we can be forgiven, we can then build up others by forgiving them. It may not always be easy, but it is liberating. And that is resurrection.

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