

### **Reflections on Easter**

I spent Easter visiting a Baptist church with my son – a very different experience!

**'Halfway through the Easter Day Service the Pastor asked "What does Easter mean to you? Tell someone!**

A man said "It gives me hope".

A woman with tears in her eyes said "It is the reason I was set free from alcoholism 15 years ago."

Another person said 'It explains how I try to live my life.'

I was deeply moved by their sincerity and honesty. There was such a feeling of joy in the room and deep gratitude to the living Jesus whose sacrifice and love had touched their lives and changed them. Easter had transformed them.

### **Transformation**

In our dark and difficult world, Easter brings light and hope. It transforms everything.

Ask the people of Ukraine as they celebrated Orthodox Easter this week and in the midst of conflict, destruction and war proclaimed. "Christ is Risen!" "Truly He is Risen."

*Their* hope is in the light of Christ dispelling the present darkness, in good triumphing over evil, in justice prevailing and the hope of peace restored.

### **'Christ is Risen!' – "Truly He is Risen!"**

Their proclamation is of Christ, of his death and resurrection – and of their own transformed lives; of a people looking ahead in hope in the context of terrible tragedy and death.

Their President said; "Even if you (Russia) destroy all our Ukrainian cathedrals and churches, you will not destroy our faith, our sincere belief in Ukraine and God, or (our belief in) people. God sees everything – and God responds." (President Zelensky interview March 2022). There is such remarkable confidence and faith in God in these words; such courage and strength. God changes us. Jesus changes us. The Holy Spirit changes us. As (with the faithful people of Ukraine) we follow the Risen Christ, we too are transformed from the people we once were into people of confidence, courage, hope, justice and peace.

### **The presence of the living God transforms lives.**

#### **Paul's Transformation**

In an encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, Saul was transformed from a feared and fearsome persecutor of Christians, to Paul, an Evangelist on fire for Jesus.

His own description of his earlier life and actions says it all:

*'I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it – but – God – was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I may proclaim him among the Gentiles.'* Galatians 1:13-16

In the Book of Acts and in his Letters to the early church we hear of Paul's faith and the growth of the church as people responded to his proclamation of the Gospel. We hear of the hardships he endured. We hear of him hungry, beaten, imprisoned and shipwrecked. With unwavering commitment he bore witness to Jesus, risen, ascended and glorified.

**Ananias**, who was sent to meet Saul in Damascus, was transformed too. It's hard to imagine how fearful he must have been with the news that Saul was coming to Damascus. There was

such a contrast between the two; Saul, who 'breathed threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1) and Ananias, the faithful man who obediently responded to a vision of the Risen Christ and laid hands on Saul so that he could regain his sight. Christians sometimes have to be risk takers!

### **Peter's Transformation**

This theme of transformation is continued in today's Gospel though perhaps it's not immediately obvious.

What on earth were the disciples up to?

Just days after encountering the Risen Christ, it seems they've gone back to their usual work. Six of them, led by Peter, are fishing. And they're not doing very well. The fish seem to have vanished.

Whatever happened to their resolve to follow Jesus after their encounter with him?

It's a domestic scene on the beach; a Master Chef moment. Breakfast is on its way. Jesus is cooking fish and bread and giving the fishermen advice; '*Cast your nets on the right side of the boat*'. *John 21:6* Peter responds in a characteristic way. When he recognises the Lord he throws on some clothes and enters the water before later helping to haul the full nets ashore. 153 fish are heavy!

Fish and bread. We've heard of a meal like this before. 5000 people enjoyed it. It reminds us of the Eucharist; of the heavenly banquet, of abundant provision and of Holy Presence but fish and bread are not the end of the story. After breakfast Jesus has some questions for Peter.

*"Simon son of John, do you love me? Feed my sheep."*

*'Simon, do you love me? Tend my sheep.'*

*'Do you love me? Feed my sheep.'* *John 21:15-19*

Peter feels hurt. *'Lord, you know that I love you.'*

### **Before our very eyes, transformation takes place.**

The man who denied Jesus three times now three times proclaims his unfailing love. It's love that will sustain him in the difficult and dangerous path of discipleship that the resurrected Jesus has just predicted.

*'Follow me'* says Jesus. *'Follow me.'*

### **What would you say if I asked you about the difference Easter has made in your life; about how it has transformed you?**

Would you tell a personal story about hope; about release from addiction; about a changed life; about the extraordinary gift of renewing love and peace that is God's gracious gift in Jesus Christ?

This Easter, like the people of Wingham, Ukraine and Damascus, like Paul and Ananias, Peter and the disciples, may our own lives be renewed and transformed as the Risen Christ stands in our midst. May His presence and light shine brightly in our lives.

Let us not fail in love. Let us be renewed in zeal. The Risen Christ is calling us; sending us to feed and tend the peoples of the world – and the people of Croydon - with the gift of love, forgiveness, justice, grace and peace which He won for us and which today, we celebrate.