

The Rectory
Rectory Close
Radyr CF15 8EW
vicki.burrows@me.com
Tel 029 20842417 or 07515 965781



Dear Friends

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

Since 1988, I have thought about Jemima every Easter morning. Jemima and William, our eldest son, shared a four-bed ward in Epsom District Hospital during the first year of their lives. Both were poorly infants. William is a healthy young man today. One spring morning, as I pushed his pram through the daffodils in Rosebery park, Jemima's mother met me and shared the sad news that her beloved first born had died on Easter morning just as the church bells rang out. My Easter Alleluia's are always tinged with a sense of sadness for a life cut short by illness. This year the bells will not ring out but I will still think of Jemima and all who mourn the death of loved ones.



During Lent 2020 our lives have changed dramatically. We have lost the ability to socialise and travel freely; we cannot see our friends and family or gather together at present. Whether we are Christian, Muslim or Jew, we miss the opportunity to meet with others to express our faith. Being alone at Easter, Passover or Ramadan will be painful but this is a small sacrifice to ensure others do not catch Covid19 and possibly die alone in hospital.

Each and every one of us is learning a new way of life, we call it "social distancing" and it seems to go against the grain of what it is to be truly human. We miss the warmth and physical contact of being with others. Through our temporary separations we are learning what is most precious to us. I am learning how to be a Vicar all over again. Days are spent on the phone working my way alphabetically through our church members to check on their well-being whilst helping our youngsters grapple with Distance Learning. I'm learning more about digital communication and how to be a YouTubing Vicar. Thankfully, I have the company of family but often I think of and pray for those who live alone especially those who are doubly isolated without online technology.

As thousands of lives are cut short by Covid19, I suspect this and future generations will look back on 2020 and see it as the year that changed the way we live, work and, most importantly, care for one another both in sickness and in health. The death of a young man over two thousand years ago also changed the way people saw the world. The biblical narrative tells stories, not just of long ago but of lives lived today in joy and sorrow, sickness and pain.

Our bible stories begin with both the vast expanse and beauty of creation and the intimacy of a perfect garden - Eden. Very quickly humanity fell from a place of beauty and innocence – grasping for what was not theirs, harming each other and building their own empires. One small Bronze Age tribe of people began to sense that God was with them, guiding and blessing their footsteps. Sometimes they even dared to believe that this one God who addressed them and whom they worshipped was on their side. They saw God's hand in the birth of their children, in their successes and sometimes in their failures. They cried out to God when they were sick or in adversity. Often they expressed their anger, lamentations and desolation for a world that seemed to be blatantly unfair. Sometimes they remembered God and said, "thank you" for their many blessings.

As the years went by, prophets spoke into the mess humans made of the world. These quasi shepherds, priests, prophets and politicians reminded this tribe to care for their neighbours, cherish and protect the widow, orphan and stranger in their midst. Despite their attempt to be separate, different, pure, holy and righteous they came to believe their vocation was in fact to be a light to the nations showing God's care for the weakest in society and expressing their gratitude for their blessings in worship. But so often they went astray reverting to their own selfish lives. Some were deeply aware of their own sinfulness and many believed that one day God would send a Messiah to save them from their enemies and perhaps even from themselves. Many hoped this Saviour would be in the mould of their much loved king, David, who was far from perfect and yet was a hero in his time.

In those days few dared to imagine that God was anything but far away and beyond their reach – in fact they believed that they could not live (unchanged) in God's presence. And perhaps they were right. None could imagine a child born to a not quite married mother would be their saviour and, as they put it, nothing good had ever come out of Nazareth. Yet from humble beginnings a child, whose ancestors included prostitutes, foreigners and failures, began to see the world in a new light. From his early years he seemed to have a deep and spiritual connection with God. As he walked the dusty streets he gathered around him a very ordinary group of friends. Through his words and his actions he spoke out against injustice and oppression and touched the untouchables of his day. He challenged those who made religion their god - pointing out others who were kinder and more generous than they. Nobody likes change or to be told their understanding of the world is deep down wrong. No wonder the religious and the rulers of the day needed him dead for he threatened their power bases. And when they had their wicked way and crucified an innocent man, whose love so reflected the love that we believe or want to believe is God's, they thought they had got rid of him once and for all. But they were wrong for he continues to haunt us all, even today.

Whilst the four gospel stories differ in their telling of that first Easter morning there are two things that remain consistent - the tomb was empty and all who dared to say that God had raised his Christ from the dead failed to recognise him at first. For a moment Mary Magdalene thought he was the gardener, two friends walking along the road imagined him to be a stranger, others a ghost. He came to meet them when they were least expecting it - in one moment he was there, and then in the next he was gone....behind closed doors, beside the lake, as they broke bread and opened the scripture together. The risen Lord was seen in astounding offers of forgiveness and the opportunity to make a new start. Very many years after he was murdered Paul, and others like him who never met the human Jesus, experienced the risen Christ of faith in a blinding light that made them change their lives and declare, "We've seen the risen Lord"

For Jemima's mother and all those who mourn this Easter it is so hard to believe there is a God let alone the One God whom Christians maintain was in Christ Jesus our Lord. Yet, as some of us cast our minds back to the stories he told, we realise we too have seen him. Remember this? "When I was hungry you fed me, when I was naked you clothed me, when I was sick or in prison you visited me".

This Easter, I wonder, is it too much a stretch of the imagination for us to say, in the midst of a global pandemic we have seen our risen Lord amongst the suffering and the grief in a million acts of kindness? Who would have believed that in a week we would raise nearly £40,000 to feed our amazing NHS staff at The Heath? Did you imagine that a million would respond when the NHS asked for 250,000 volunteers? Leave behind your cynicism; big companies are not only interested in profit; James Dyson is producing ventilators and the Mercedes F1 Team has joined forces with University College London to produce breathing aids and save lives. In our own communities we have seen resurrection - families, neighbours and strangers are calling, caring for and feeding one another - this is not social distancing but communion. Will you dare with me to believe, that in the midst of grief and suffering, we can all say, "Alleluia Christ is risen" and "I have seen the risen Lord"?

Christians have never believed in dead men walking, nor do we believe in reincarnation but we do believe in the resurrection of the body, that The Word that became flesh in a human life once upon a time can never be silenced - you and I and millions others whether they know it or not are the body of Christ sharing God's love in the world right here and right now.

I pray you will see and feel and know the risen Lord - both in sickness and in health and I wish you many blessings this Easter.

Vicki
Vicar of The Parish of Radyr



New life – growing up at The Rectory

