

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

Dear Friends,

“He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him...”

I'm writing to you on Good Friday - 18 minutes ago according to my iPhone, dozens were killed and injured in Taiwan when a train crashed and derailed in a tunnel. The train reportedly hit a construction vehicle that had slipped onto the tracks at the tunnel's mouth. At this moment it is not known how the vehicle slipped down the embankment. There are photos of the less affected carriages but undoubtedly before too long the gruesome images will appear and it will be hard not to look as they flash up on our screens. It was ever thus. When I lived in Surrey I had the dubious privilege of travelling regularly on the M25 and A3 to work in London - both stretches of road were known for the high number of fatal accidents. It was not unusual to see ambulances surrounding cars on fire or a lorry wedged on top of a small vehicle - the police would inevitably direct us past the carnage; cars would slow and heads would turn and stare. In these salutary moments we were reminded of our own fragility and the realisation that we drive far too fast in vehicles which at our bidding have the capacity to kill. It seems to me that Good Friday is in some way just such a moment. We feel compelled to gaze at the cross and yet we want to look away because we feel a sense of guilt and shame as we watch an innocent victim suffer that we might be healed.

Not long ago, when our youngest child had both “accident” and “careless” on her spelling list I tried to explain the meaning of these two words to her whilst thinking of those hilarious reports written by insurance claimants. Gaffes such as "The car in front hit the pedestrian but he got up so I hit him again" or "In an attempt to kill a fly, I drove into a telephone pole," make us giggle but I do remember some 30 years ago loading our sons into the car and reversing into a tree outside a friend's house in Epsom. I could swear it wasn't there when I parked it hours earlier!

Is there a difference between an accident and carelessness? Try explaining to a small child that getting “slime” or “play dough” on the carpet is careless not an accident! Or try explaining to the doctor who attempted to remove shards of glass from our teenage son's chest, when his brother pushed him through the plate glass window whilst wrestling in the Vicarage lounge, that our boys are simply accident prone!

Today as I gaze at the cross and try to imagine the pain and suffering Jesus endured, I know deep down that this was no accident. People like me helped to nail him to the tree. Nor was it an act of carelessness on God's part. The word careless seems to indicate that had he tried a bit harder this horrific murder would not have happened. This could not have been an accident on the part of the victim or on the part of those who hung him on the tree, for all involved knew exactly what they were doing. In a place where the occupying forces held power and applied it viciously in order to keep the peace everyone knew the consequence of speaking out. The crosses that lined the highway bore testament to this sad truth. In a place where the religious valued their privileges and saw fit to marginalise all unable to follow their rules of purity, a voice crying in the wilderness or mocking their religiosity could not last long. The religious people were skilled in keeping their hands clean and needed the Romans, not least when it came to murder for, as you know, “thou shalt not kill.”

When we proclaim that ‘God so loved the world that he sent his only Son’ we are certainly not proclaiming that he selected his only, his beloved son to suffer but that he made himself vulnerable, risked all that he had to free others from the suffering that the powerful inflicted on them. When we look at Jesus, Christians proclaim they are looking at God's very self: vulnerable love. This was no accident but a carefully executed plan to show God's reckless and undying offer of salvation not just to individuals but to a broken world.

When the broken body of Jesus was taken down and buried in the tomb of Joseph of Aramathea - it seemed to all who knew him, those who loved him and even those who hated him that his life was over. Laid in a tomb the man was dead and gone, and all that was left to do was to give him a decent burial. According to Mark, the earliest of gospel writers, the women who took spices to anoint Jesus discover the tomb empty and a young man who tells them "*he is not here.....he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him...*" According to the earliest manuscripts of Mark's gospel that is the end of the story - the women flee the tomb saying, "nothing to anyone, for they were afraid".

But of course it was not the end for as the years went by more stories were told and a pattern emerged such that people began to say "he is risen indeed. Alleluia!" And even now, more than 2,000 years later, individuals who never knew the man are still say "I have seen the Lord".



On countless occasions I have prayed in the church of the Holy Sepulchre, built over the place where our Lord was allegedly both crucified and buried. As the queue of people waiting to enter the sepulchre lengthens a lone voice waiting to enter this holy place so often reminds me, "He's not here, he's risen". And that's the point - in returning to Galilee, bereft, afraid and alone, those who had loved him and those who came to know him realised that they had seen him. Not a dead man walking but God's very life finding them. Then, as now, the risen Lord is seen fleetingly not just when bread is broken and wine poured but when the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the stranger welcomed and the lonely and sick are visited. Even today when those who are grieving find strangers walking alongside them, even today in the mundane life of Galilee or another Llandaff lockdown people still dare to say, in moments of unexpected blessing, "I have seen the Lord"

The death and resurrection of the Son of God is the story of God's vulnerable and eternal love willingly poured out for you and me,

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

Wishing you every blessing this Easter,

Vicki

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