

Sermon for Good Friday 10th April 2020

We managed to buy some toilet rolls recently! Who would have thought a few weeks ago that that would be something worth saying! So much has changed in the last few weeks. As Her Majesty said on Sunday the coronavirus has brought grief to some, many are threatened by loss of livelihood and all affected.

Now you can only go out once a day for exercise. Imagine how awful that is – having to exercise every day! If you do go out people cross the road to avoid you – although that has happened to me quite often.

People are asking questions. How long will this go on? Where is God and why does He allow this?

Just under two weeks ago I was looking forward to preaching on Passion Sunday, not Palm Sunday on the story of Lazarus. He was a good friend of Jesus and he lived with his sisters at Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. He fell ill and his sister sent a message to Jesus. Jesus was not there and Lazarus got worse and died. Grief had come to that house and people asked why Jesus had not done anything. They knew Him as a healer but He had stayed away.

When Jesus did return, he met Martha in the village and spoke about what had happened. Jesus then give one of those great claims. He said He is the resurrection and the life. But He did not stop there, He went on to ask, “Do you believe this?” I think He was asking “What you really believe when things get bad, when you are really up against? It is a question that we as Christians are asked now.

We know what happens next. Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb and he is miraculously raised from the dead. A marvel. But suddenly things get serious. Up until then Jesus had been a teacher, a healer and popular, but now things change. The authorities realise they have to get rid of Him and quick. Jesus was challenging the authorities. He challenged people who did not believe in resurrection by raising Lazarus to life. He challenged authorities who got a rake off from the money changers by clearing the Temple and he challenged the political consensus by claiming to be a King by riding into Jerusalem.

Jesus threatened their little world. They had to act quick before Passover. Too late and there would be a riot and they would lose control. They found an opportunity when Judas betrayed Jesus. Then started a series of interrogations and trials. You can count 5 or 6. Jesus was passed from pillar to post. Jesus was murdered after an illegal trial; they should never had tried someone at night or tried to force Him to incriminate Himself.

Jesus ends up on Good Friday alone abandoned and forsaken. I expect people were asking questions, why would God allow that to happen to anyone?

Christians believe that Jesus died for a reason. He died to set us free from our sins. by rising from the dead He opened to us life everlasting and a new type of life.

There is no easy answer to suffering. Suffering and pain have always existing.

But clear God understands. His only Son experienced the worst. At a time like this I like to dust off the book of Psalms. A favourite is Psalm 91 which has an image of God sheltering a brood of chicks like a mother bird. Sudden danger and death stalk for us but God exists and we should have faith in Him.

For some of the characters it was journey's end on Good Friday. The two robbers died with Jesus. Pilate was recalled to Rome. As Christians we cannot think of Good Friday without thinking of Easter Day. I want you to think about the way the journey goes on. Not Easter morning but Easter evening. There were two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They gradually became aware of a third person, the presence of someone else. That is sometimes how we experience God; we gradually understand that Jesus is there. He asks us, "What do you really believe?" Do you believe in Him who suffered, who understands and has been through it for you?