

Henley-in-Arden Baptist Church
“Staying Connected” 4 – Sunday 12th April 2020

Staying connected to God and each other while not meeting as church in the normal way.

Happy Easter! He is risen!

John 20:19b

Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’

The churches are empty, but in these unusual – and sometimes bewildering – times, the Christian message continues to resound. Jesus experienced suffering and death for us; and now, Jesus is alive! This week’s edition of *Staying Connected* is longer than usual given the special week in the Christian calendar..

‘Passion week’ includes the last events of Jesus’ earthly life, culminating in his death and resurrection.

You might want to look at the last chapters of each gospel for the account of these events.

Matthew 26-28 / Mark 14-16 / Luke 22-24 / John 18-21

Maundy Thursday

We pick up at the special meal Jesus had with his friends, (where, in John’s Gospel (chapter 13 in fact), he demonstrated what service looks like by washing his disciples’ feet). In Matthew, He explains

the symbolism of the bread and wine and his impending death for us.

Matthew 26:26-28

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.



When we share in bread and wine together in our services (as we will do when we resume), we remember Jesus sacrificial death for us.

Good Friday

There was nothing obviously ‘good’, on the face of it, about the proceedings of that day.

Matthew 27:27-31

²⁷ Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers round him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said. ³⁰ They spat on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

The irony is the world put to death the one who had come to save them. And the cross itself became the saving event, as God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself. (2 Cor 5:19)



We have 7 sayings of Jesus from the cross, spread over the four gospel accounts. Why not take time to look these up and meditate on each one... [Luke 23:34, Luke 23:43, Luke 23:46, Matthew 27:46 / Mark 15:34, John 19:26-27, John 19:28, John 19:30] That there are four different gospel accounts rather than one gives a far richer picture for us.

Choosing one to look at a bit more here:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” [Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34]. Here Jesus is quoting from Psalm 22 and expressing a real spiritual agony as the pain of separation from God the Father is experienced... and yet... and the same time, God the Father too is experiencing this pain of separation... Sometimes, we rush on to Easter and the good news of the resurrection(!), but it is good to spend time dwelling here for a while. There’s Good Friday and then Saturday, before Easter.

I am not sure we will ever fathom the richness and depth of meaning that the event of the cross entails. There are so many angles we can take to explore and reflect. Maybe just quiet contemplation is the best approach, leading to gratitude and worship of all our God has done for us in love.

*When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ my God:
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down:
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small,
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.*

[Isaac Watts (1674-1748)]

As another hymn puts it:
“...heaven’s peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love”

This is why it’s ‘good’ Friday – sheer love and G.R.A.C.E. (God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense) for us.

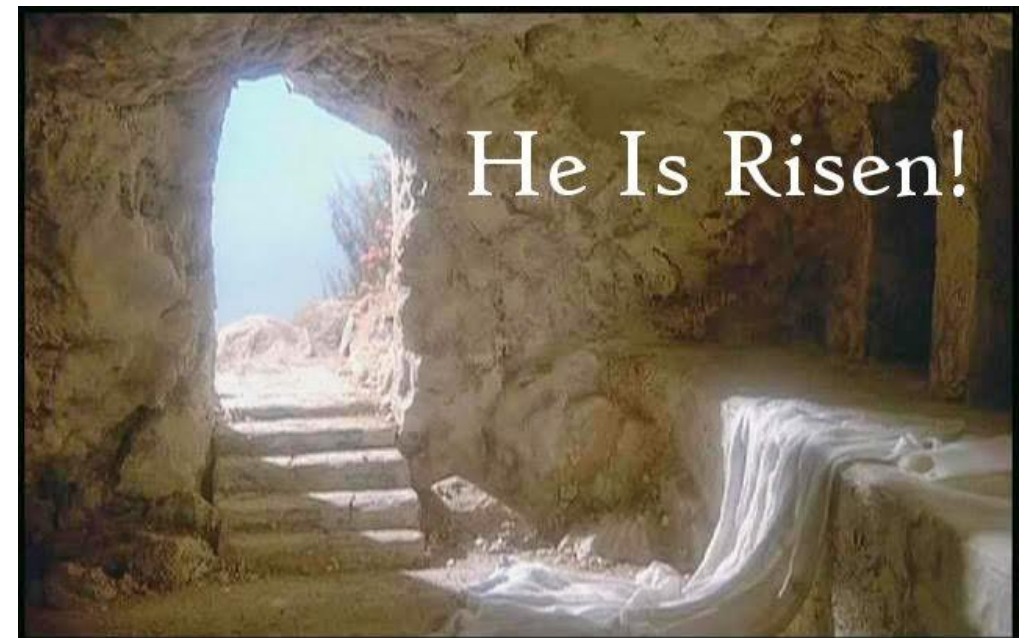
Easter Sunday Jesus has risen!

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men

said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’
⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ “The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.” ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened



The resurrection of Christ is not only a well-attested event; but is rich in meaning and earth-shattering significance. As well as proving who Jesus was and the efficacy and importance of the cross, it transformed the lives of the disciples. And it transforms lives today. There is a real hope – for us; and one day the renewal of all creation too.

Meanwhile we live and work with that hope; and inspired and energised by the gift of Holy Spirit also. We can face the very real heartache and current difficulties with the confidence that God is with us, and not only that, but He has the victory over these things. It's comforting to know the ending of the Christian story of salvation which is about life and renewal. "Death has been swallowed up in victory.....through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:54-57)

Lord Jesus, you have conquered sin and death, and you are alive and reigning... Thank you that you identified with humanity and you are no stranger to suffering. You understand; you are alive and victorious, yet you still have the scars. Help us to turn to you for our help in all things.

In these times of global suffering and chaos, trauma and grief, help us to have faith in you, and the Easter hope you bring...

Thank you for your grace and love poured out for us and demonstrated for all time in the events of that week 2000 years ago. Thank You that we can lean on You, our hope, our comfort, our strength. We pray for our loved ones at this time – that you would be close to them, and meet their needs in mind, body and spirit.

In these times of great difficulty, we pray for staff in the NHS, and all those carrying enormous burdens of work and responsibility on

behalf of us all and the common good. Lord, be their help and strength, we pray.

Thank You, heavenly Father, for Your indescribable love; grant us Your peace. We pray in the name of Jesus; who is alive and reigning with You, and the Holy Spirit. One God, now and always

Amen

A reminder...

Please continue to pray; please continue to telephone.

Services on TV and radio this week include:

Good Friday (10th April)

- Radio 4 3:00pm – Good Friday meditations – led by Baptist Minister, Richard Littledale

Easter Sunday (12th April)

- Radio 4 8:10am – led by the Archbishop of Canterbury
- BBC1 11:25am Easter Service at Bangor Cathedral
- BBC1 1:15pm Songs of Praise from Birmingham

And finally, please do get in touch with me at any time

May God bless you with His peace.

Mike

01564 793975