

EASTER SUNDAY
12th April 2020
Rev Jack Bateson

READINGS

Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in

Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Colossians 3:1-4

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

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John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.

The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

THE COLLECT

Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory;
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit
be praise and honour, glory and might,
now and in all eternity. Amen.

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SERMON

Who can remember what they wanted to be when they were a child? For me, I was obsessed with becoming a train driver – becoming a curate never crossed my mind, let alone being called to school chaplaincy! I have enjoyed sharing life's journey with you all immensely over the past three years. When in 2017, we arrived, I had it in mind to string out my curacy as long as possible – I even had it in the back of my mind that I would be that curate the archdeacon threatens with eviction!

But as I get older I'm coming to realise that God has a plan, and although we can make our own, His will is the one which prevails. I certainly hadn't planned to go into school chaplaincy. However, when the position was offered, Tracey and I both felt God's hand was very much in this process.

And this is just the plans of a very minor curate, have you ever considered Jesus' life plan?

Born as a baby in Bethlehem, laid in a food trough, the child of a peasant woman, He then moved to Egypt as a refugee and later ended up in Nazareth, Galilee, and we all know nothing good comes from Galilee!

This He didn't have much control over, He was under the care of His earthly parents.

As He grew up though, perhaps He had greater control over His life plan, His work, where He lived, who He looked forward to marrying – perhaps He even lived these dreams for a while, following in Joseph's footsteps.

This life didn't last for long though, as He ended up a preacher, a healer, a miracle maker. Was this His life plan? Was He ok to go along with this? Perhaps! To teach and preach after all isn't so bad. To heal and to be a miracle worker, let's face it, has got to be pretty cool – fun even – who wouldn't like to walk on water, feed several thousands with just a picnic, or be able to turn water into wine? That is all pretty amazing stuff, don't you think? And even though as a child He probably never thought this would become His life, it must have been pretty good when it all happened.

However as a child, as a teenager, did he wistfully ever reflect 'Oh, I can't wait until I am old enough to travel to Jerusalem, it will be good to go without the parents this time. I remember that year they left me behind.'

As a young man, perhaps whilst carving a chair out of wood, did He ever day dream 'Oh I cannot wait to be hated, to be turned over to my enemies.' Did He ever think 'Oh a trial, how exciting, to be lied about, spat at, beaten, mocked – yippee, can't wait'.

Was it ever part of His life plan to be crucified? To be nailed up and to die on a cross? As He was having a meal with his family, did He ever look up and ponder how He hoped to be left to die in the most undignified manner. 'I wonder when I am dying on the cross, struggling to breathe, with the pain in my hands and feet and chest, whether people will be gambling for my clothes.'

As He walked along rivers with His friends or went for picnics on hillsides, did He ever share 'Oh, when I die I do hope I have no-one to look after my body, I do hope that I will be laid in a borrowed tomb.'

Was dying for humanity ever part of Jesus' life plan? Did it ever have to be? Would we all actually be ok if Jesus had just stayed a Carpenter, got married and settled down and had children?

Did Jesus know His life plan? And more importantly, did He know His life plan was actually a death plan?

Well, it seems that He did. We do not know when He came to know it. But He did.

And yet He still came down from Heaven to Earth for us. But also, He didn't just die at any old time for no good reason. This was no accidental homicide.

The bible tells us in John 7:1 that Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.

On this occasion and on others Jesus avoided being killed by the authorities. He did not come to this world just to die in any old fashion. Jesus did not get killed just because – He could have got killed many times before, but when He did, it was the right time! And He was not naïve, He knew that in coming to earth, it meant death and that the death in store for Him, was not going to be pleasant, He knew what it was going to entail.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Mark says (14:33-36) : He began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from him. 'Abba, Father', Jesus said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'

In John 12:27 Jesus says, 'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.'

In John 13:1-3 it says: It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.

Jesus knew His time on earth was to be short. He knew that He had come not just to heal, perform miracles, to a food supplier, Jesus knew He came to live and die for us all – AND YET HE STILL CAME. The words of Jesus reveal that He knew it was going to hurt, He knew His mind, body, heart and soul were going to be troubled, in anguish and yet still Jesus left heaven to be on this earth for us.

Now the miracle of Jesus coming alive again, of being risen, of conquering death is amazing, beyond amazing in fact, but consider this. Before He could live on earth, die and rise again, He had to leave the comforts of heaven to come to this earth. He had to leave Heaven.

Consider the following ... fiction and yet ...

The Long Silence

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne.

Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly – not with cringing shame, but with belligerence.

'Can God judge us? How can He know about suffering?' snapped a young brunet.

She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp.

'We endured terror... beatings ... torture ... death!'

In another group a young black man lowered his collar. 'What about this?' he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. 'Lynched ... for no crime but being black!'

In another crowd, a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes. 'Why should I suffer?' she murmured. 'It wasn't my fault.'

Far out across the plain there were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering He permitted in His world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that man had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a young black man, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the centre of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever.

Before God could be qualified to be their judge, He must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth – as a man!

'Let him be born of Jew. Let the legitimacy of His birth be doubted. Give Him a work so difficult that even His family will think Him out of His mind when He tries to do it.'

'Let Him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let Him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let Him be tortured.'

'At the last let Him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let Him die. Let Him die so that there can be no doubt that He died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.'

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled.

And when the last had finished pronouncing the sentence, there was a long silence.

No-one uttered a word. No-one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had already served His sentence.

Anon, uncredited quote by John Stott (1986)

And if we left the story here, perhaps some would feel God had empathised with them, that God knew what suffering was all about, which would mean something – but where would any hope be in this? Where would any future hope be?

The hope for us all comes in that Jesus did not stay dead and that is what we celebrate today – we celebrate a man whose life plan did not perhaps match what His family had thought. We celebrate and give thanks for a man who said ‘yes’, when God said ‘go’, a man who shows us actually there is no fear in death, because death is not an end, death in many senses is a new beginning.

This story was entrusted to His Disciples. In turn it is entrusted to us today.

Jesus in Heaven was told to ‘go’, and in faith He did, He went from heaven to earth, then He heard ‘go’ again. And so He died and went to the grave and then He heard ‘go’ again and this time it was to come alive and so before returning to Heaven He spent time on earth.

He went to those who had denied Him, betrayed Him, to His disciples and He said, look, there is more to death. There is life, eternal life, and until you get to be with me again I am going to give you a community, fellow believers, the church if you will.

This community is going to keep spreading around the world, it is going to reach more people in more places, it will embrace more cultures and shape more lives than any movement in history and for this to continue I have to go, and then He returned to heaven – and so today He calls us also to ‘go’.

Frederick Buechner writes, ‘to journey for the sake of saving our own lives is little by little to cease to live in any sense that really matters, even to ourselves, because it is only by journeying for the worlds sake – even when the world bores and sickens and scares you half to death-that little by little we start to come alive.’

Jesus journeyed for us, to death and to being raised again. If we truly follow Him, we too can be alive in our lives on earth but also for eternity with Jesus.

So, finally, what is Jesus' life plan for you today?

John 6:28 - 29 : Then the Disciples asked Jesus, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent.’

This Easter time and forever more, can we do this, believe and share it with others – not to do so rather negates Jesus coming to earth in the first place.

Jesus' life plan was for you to have life – and to share it with others!!

Happy Easter!!

A HYMN : Thine Be The Glory

By: Edmund Budry (Translated By Richard Birch Hoyle)

Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son:
endless is the vict'ry thou o'er death hast won;
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body lay.

Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son;
endless is the vict'ry thou o'er death hast won.

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
let the church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing,
for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.

Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son;
endless is the vict'ry thou o'er death hast won.

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life;
life is naught without thee: aid us in our strife;
make us more than conqu'rors, thro' thy deathless love:
bring us safe thro' Jordan to thy home above.

Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son;
endless is the vict'ry thou o'er death hast won.