

Sermon – Easter Day

Haselton – Cold Aston – Notgrove

I wonder how many Easter Eggs have been consumed nationwide so far this morning? Here are a few interesting facts about Easter that might have passed you by...

Each child in the UK receives an average of 8.8 Easter eggs each year; the equivalent of twice their recommended weekly calorie intake

Each household spends on average £75 on Easter treats each year

Temptation can be too much and 43 per cent of children say they eat their first chocolate egg before Easter Sunday, but the average time for children to eat their first Easter egg is 11am on Easter Sunday morning.

We might think present giving only happens at Christmas, but clearly present giving in the form of Easter eggs is a huge aspect of many families' Easter celebrations.

But whilst many families readily make the link between Christmas presents and the gifts brought to the baby Jesus by the wise men, the link between Easter gifts and the good news of Jesus' resurrection on Easter morning is less obvious.

So this morning I thought I would highlight three of the gifts that Jesus' resurrection offers us – and each of these is found in this morning's gospel reading from St Matthew.

The first gift is **Freedom from Fear**.

When the women arrived at the tomb they were greeted by an angel, rolling back the stone. The soldiers on guard shook with fear but the angel said to the women: *do not be afraid*...later the disciples greeted Jesus face to face and he said: *do not be afraid*.

On great feast and family days like today, we usually find it quite easy to forget our fears. Yet, for many of us, fear is part of our daily life. Sometimes that fear takes on dramatic and frightening forms if there is someone or a situation of which we are literally afraid. At other times, our fears are more subtle, but no less damaging - fear of rejection, fear of loss, fear of inadequacy. Sometimes our

fears are real and imminent – fear of receiving our test results from hospital, fear of running out of credit; more often, our fears are rooted in our imaginations and our dreams, and in practice have little substance to truly disturb us.

Yet we remain afraid, and we live in a world where many politicians, marketeers and the media feed ravenously on our untapped fears.

Yet the risen Jesus tells us not to be afraid, but instead to believe and trust in Him. He has risen from the dead, He has conquered all, in Him and only in Him, we can have absolute confidence and trust.

Jesus' second gift of the resurrection is **Peace**.

The moment of Jesus' death and the moment of his resurrection are marked by violent happenings in the world. The temple curtain was ripped in two and the sky went dark the moment that Jesus died. A violent earthquake accompanies the resurrection.

Perhaps these are literary and symbolic devices but even so we are reminded of the terrible forces in our world that are never far from the presence of goodness.

We pray every day for the dark corners of this world where terror and violence seek to undermine humanity and creation's natural predisposition to goodness and hope.

Yet despite the weight of evidence that might suggest that this world is in terrible and irreversible decline, the birth of every child ushers in new hope that the future might be different to all the patterns of the past. This was brought home to me only a fortnight ago when a one week old baby made her first visit to church in Northleach attending a friend's baptism.

Embracing the peace of Christ is key to helping to build a world, a Kingdom of God, where the risen Christ and not evil rules.

It is not for facile reasons that we share the peace of Christ with one another in church; but because in so doing we both wish to spread Christ's love amongst us and because we wish that love to overcome the petty

issues that can so often divide a Christian community. Sharing the peace is a sign in church of what we pray and work for beyond our church walls. Our third gift of the resurrection this Easter morning is: **A message to be shared.**

The angel said to the women: *He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. This is my message for you. So they left the tomb quickly and ran to tell his disciples.*

We are swift to tell others good news when it comes to a new birth, a successful job promotion, a move to larger home, the start of a new business venture.

Yet we are often more reticent when it comes to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, or to express it more accessibly, the difference God has made to our lives. Somehow we expect the church to grow and flourish through a process of spiritual osmosis rather than through proactive initiatives on our part. Some might even think that this is what the clergy is for.

At some point in our past, the Holy Spirit impacted our lives and drew us towards church. For many of us, our lives would feel barren and purposeless without the faith

that nourishes and sustains us. The good news that first impacted our hearts, remains good news, and it is ours for sharing.

Three tiny words in our gospel reading today should give us the confidence to do this. They are these: *as he said.*

The angel said to the women: *He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.*

The disciples didn't believe Jesus would rise from the dead as he said he would. But he did. God keeps his promises; God does what it says on the tin. All it requires from us this Easter morning is to believe.

Chris is risen – Alleluia! Amen.