

# Mike's message . . . .

I'm writing this month's letter just ahead of Passion Sunday (22nd March). It's the Sunday before Palm Sunday and the themes of Lent, until now about repentance and forgiveness, take a dramatic turn. From now until Easter the remaining two weeks will be focussed on the specific events of Jesus' passion; his suffering, death and resurrection.

We've been focussing on much of this during the last five weeks at our weekly Lent Course. We've followed the Passion of Jesus as described by Matthew in his Gospel. We've accompanied the Gospel narrative with images from the visual art, and music - from Bach's St Matthew Passion to Jesus Christ Superstar. Bible study notes are still on line if you're interested (see link below). But this week (as I write) we will be ending our studies with Jesus dead and buried - a stone cold tomb, sealed by the authorities - hopes extinguished, love defeated!

As Christians we live with the benefit of hindsight. Our faith tells us that God's love is stronger than death itself. Just as the grave, and death itself, couldn't hold the body of Jesus, so too God's love lives on even when all around seems darkness, hopelessness and despair. Some people can witness to their experience of how in times of despair; bereavement, loss of work, breakdown of relationships, illness, hopelessness, they have experienced God's love breaking through in dramatic ways. For many others, including myself, it is a more gradual process of an awareness of God's love accepting us without condition - an all giving, all accepting love.

But how much do we live the Resurrection in our own lives, or those of our church communities? The Gospel for Passion Sunday (John 12 .20 - 33) includes:

*(Jesus said) "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit". (John 12.25)*

From death comes resurrection. But not just one-for-one. From a single dying grain comes forth much fruit. John is possibly quoting here from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15), written before John's Gospel. But leaving aside scriptural history what does it mean for us?

Sometimes we cling onto things in our lives, or the lives of our churches, that we need to let go of. We see something coming to an end as a failing. We're frightened of endings and death itself.

In faith we need to relinquish the past! Sometimes we need to stop propping up an ailing cause, building, service or event. Move on to pastures new! Let the past go! Let the past die! Our time, energy and resources can often be better spent in furthering the message of the love of God in new ways. That's because it's God's time, energy and resources. A God who cannot be contained in death of any sort. From what we are called to let die, God can raise up much fruit in new ways.

Have a happy and holy Easter and may message of the Resurrection bear the fruit of God's love in the lives of each and every one of us.

Mike Claridge

