Easter Sunday 12/4/20 St James Bolton

I’ve been trying to think of an attention-grabbing gimmick as a way of presenting the message of Easter. But then I realised, the Gospels speak for themselves…in the words of the Apostles Creed, ‘Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead.’…Jesus was dead!...and yet as the Creed continues, ’On the third day he rose from the dead’ This is the key to the Christian faith that Jesus was dead and then he came back to life…as the traditional greeting goes, ‘Christ is risen! He is risen indeed Alleluia!’

The theological word for being raised from the dead is RESURRECTION. Our reading from Acts 10 goes further, ‘God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen’... The resurrection of Jesus was real…people saw it! The same people who were present as Jesus bled and died on the cross, who saw him put in the tomb…dead and buried…also saw him come back to life…Peter, John, Mary now saw Jesus alive…not as a ghost, or a mirage BUT as a flesh and blood person.

Does it really matter that Jesus was resurrected in flesh and blood…surely a spiritual sign would be enough?? Well Christians believe that Jesus Christ left his home in heaven to be born at Christmas time as a flesh and blood human. The book of Isaiah and then Matthew’s Gospel name this flesh and blood human as Immanuel…a name which means ‘God with us’…or God in flesh and blood…God in Jesus was very with us in all the joy but also mess and chaos, and in particular the suffering of human life. Have you noticed how in the Gospels Jesus spends so much of his time with the broken, the sick, the outcasts? This Holy Week we’ve remembered again his own suffering, leading to his crucifixion…this suffering was not just for the sake of suffering; it was very much suffering for us, suffering with us…God with us. It’s not that Jesus is overtaken by the events of Holy Week, it’s not that he has no choice. In John’s gospel Ch 10:15-18 , he tells his disciples, that he lays down his life, no-one takes it from him. St Paul confirms this in Phil 2 ‘…he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.’

So, in his life, Jesus is God with us, in his death he is God with us, and in his resurrection, he is still ‘flesh and blood’ God with us! The resurrection of Jesus affirms who Jesus is; God with us; the resurrection of Jesus validates what Jesus said about himself; ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ (John 11:25)…he told us beforehand and now it has happened…so the resurrection which was very much an idea in the realm of faith has now insisted on being part of the realm of history…it actually happened…The resurrection of Jesus proves to us we can trust everything else Jesus said, for example, ‘All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me…’(Mt 28:18)

Jesus has authority; he has power over everything…everything…he is stronger than sickness, stronger even than a Coronavirus, stronger even than death…’The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.’ (John 11:25)

This is an Easter like no other...our world is in crisis, there is a lot of suffering, a lot of death…when will all this end? And when it ends will life go back to normal? Will it ever be the same? There is a lot of debate about this; there is a lot of positivity around neighbours helping each other, communities pulling together, acts of kindness, will that continue? There is a lot of creativity around people working differently and at home, will that continue? (on Thursday I did 4 and a half different zoom video chats…many of us have learnt so much!) There is also a lot suffering out there; physically but also mentally, this is a time of great anxiety; of grief, particularly as people cannot be with their loved ones as they die, nor be at their funerals. The effects of this will continue for a long time. People have already lost livelihoods, what will the longer-term effects be on our economy, the world’s economy…times are likely to be tough, will things be fairer or will stark inequalities remain?

So, how will the church, the body of Christ respond? How will we speak into our present and ongoing situation? It’s tempting to want to give explanations of what’s going on, tempting to ask God for a quick fix…but perhaps what we need to do is like Jesus, dwell in the mess and suffering, and LAMENT…to give a passionate expression to grief and sorrow…Jesus, our flesh and blood God did this in the cross, ‘My God, my God why have you forsaken me?’ (Matt 27:46). So let us lament, pour out our hearts to God…and may we find the Holy Spirit coming to lament in us, but not leaving us there; giving us a most precious gift, the gift of HOPE. This hope springs from the power unleashed at the resurrection of Jesus…Eph 1:18-20 ‘I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, **19**and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength **20**he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,’

On this Easter day rejoice, celebrate and let God give you HOPE, for yourself but also carry that HOPE for your family, your street, your community.’

I leave you with one of my favourite Bible verses, Romans 15:13 ‘May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit’

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed Alleluia!

Rev Steve Lees