Easter Day sermon - 20th April 2025
Acts 10.34-43 Sue Sims
John 20. 1-18 Fiona Collier

Hallelujah - he is risen
Happiness, celebration, eating chocolate!

But can one persons death and resurection really change anything?

I mean, I don't want to be a downer but… what have we got to celebrate?
Lets face it - the world seems pretty bleak at the moment.
Wars without end in Ukraine and Gaza - nuclear missiles being threatened.
Elected leaders who lie and act like dictators, and dictators who are getting bolder.
Climate Change definitely above the catastrophic 2 degrees
Population at 8 billion and still rising.
Oh, and there was global pandemic 5 years ago, and the likelihood there will be another along soon.

Of course we're going to want to distract ourselves from that - eat chocolate and binge watch TV and sport.
Find Reasons to be cheerful - and go to the sliver linings in every cloud.

And yet - such global, unimaginable, seeming impossible and world changing events pose a serous challenge to our faith.
Do we have anything to offer or say - is it enough?
If Christianity, if Jesus, if the Easter resurrection, cannot deal with this reality, then we should all give up and go home.

So can it? Lets see. Come with me on a journey through time…

Jesus is so incredible, and there is so much we don't' know, that people can imagine him or portray him in lots of ways -
I love the Larry Norman song - the outlaw..
is he a wonder working miracle healer? a sorcerer doing tricks with fish and break?
Is he a poet, a crafter of words and images so powerful they change lives - the prodigal son, the good Samaritan.
Is he an outlaw, on the run, with his gang of disciples, hiding out and being hunted down.
Or is a politician - who has a cause, a truth, that gathers followers, challenges the ruling religious and roman leaders, and is ultimately killed so he doesn't start a revolution?

So death would be the end. The first impossible situation for Jesus, and God to overcome!

But death is not an impossible challenge with God, why would it be, he's God! - and Jesus pops back up again!!

The authorities deny it, spread rumours that the disciples stole the body or did some trick!
Yet turns out too many people saw him! He really is alive again!

So they stone Stephen, one of the disciples, they persecute followers of the way. Does that stop belief?

No - the church scatters and like a dandelion being blown - each person carries a seed of a new church - in Antioch, to Damascus, to Rome

Paul / Saul - tries to stop it. But its like its impossible.

The roman empire tries to wipe it out - romans candles, gladiators in teh arena - killing Christinas
You can't beat us, say the roman empire.. we'll put you down so you never jump up again

Still they cry - Jesus is Alive. God gives us hope.

And its the Roman Empire that breaks, not Christianity, and the Empire becomes Christian
(Rather the christians become empire.)

Every time God is blocked by some human device
Every time humans try to block out the goodness and the light
Everything they try to push it down - so it seems impossible for hope and love and peace and joy to survive or conquer

God does the impossible and breaks through -
Christians, full of the holy spirit, do the impossible things
Like a flower coming trhought the concrete!

Its christians who set up schools and educate people
Who set up hospitals where people can be cared for
Christians who set up prisons - so people can be restored and integrated back in society.

The impossible problems of illiteracy and poverty, of illness - its Christian faith that brings the light of hope, and god's wisdom to these things.

Do you know who discovered the periodic table - Mendeleev - a monk

Do you know that Copernicus and Galileo were paid for by the church - to explore the heavens.

And to some the Slave Trade seemed like an impossible thinkg to stop - supported by teh rich countries and with global reach. But it was Chrsitinas who believed in better, fought for change, and with faihtfuyl tenacity saw its end.

And the aparthied movemnt that changed South Africe - Rev Trevor Huddleston - Rev Desmond Tutu - it was prayer adn faith the changed the world.

Or the civil rights movement in Amerca - Rev Jesse Jackson, and a whole lot of churches. Christians.

At home and more recently you might have seen Steve Chalke from the Oasis trust - which has taken on running an Multi Academy Trust in the toughest areas of the uk, and transforming lives through education.
And now he wants to tackle gangs and knife crime through hubs.

This is God's goodness and his Business - this is a tiny bit of hope, a mustard seed of faith.
Christians making a difference, because they believe and know
that God wants things to be better.
That god has the resources, the power, to change things.
No matter what it looks like.

So where I used to live, my old parish in Bemerton in Salisbury - is in teh lowest 20% of wards in teh country.

The young people didn't have much hope, much to do. The schools worked hard, but the grammar schools creamed off all teh brightest and best, and those who were left felt like - abandoned. No hopers - you didn't pass the 11+ and now you're rubbish. So they acted like they weren't any good.

All the windows in teh church hall were smashed, so many times, we stopped claiming on insurance. And stopped repairing them. It wasn't a great place.

And one day there was a terrible tragedy - where a young man and got to the end of himself - saw no future, no hope, and did the unimaginable.

But his death sparked something in people. Some people, from the town,

Christinas, decided they had to do something.
Together with the churches help and backing - admin support you know! - they started doing detached youth work, and a youth club - oh they climbed all over that building.

And very gradually they built trust with the youngsters, they found out what they wanted to do - a skate park, make a film, par cor, bike repair - and in the place where that young man died, they build a very small community garden.

That Christian charity , Rise61, is 15 years old now - and it has several employed youth workers, they've just won a £40,000 grant to build a centre, matched by the council to build a bigger garden.

In an impossible situation, by the hand of God - hope and light and faith and joy have come..

So when I see the terrible things in the world, and am tempted to look away, or to think - its hopeless, what can I do?

I'm reminded of what God has done in the past, and what he can do
- there is nothing impossible for god

Yes the world looks bleak
But Christians - roll up your sleeves, believe that God wants things better, and he wants you to start where you are, with what he gives you - and this world will be transformed.

Christ is risen, Allelulia. Allelulia he is risen indeed - HAVE HOPE!!
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34 Then Peter began to speak to them: ‘I truly understand that God shows no partiality,
35but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.
36You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ
—he is Lord of all. 37That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after
the baptism that John announced: 38how 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. 39We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and
in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40but God raised him on
the third day and allowed him to appear, 41not 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. 42He
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. 43All the prophets testify about him that everyone who
believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’

20
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. 2So 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.’ 3Then
Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. 4The two were running
together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent down to
look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter
came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and
the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a
place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he
saw and believed; 9for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from
the dead. 10Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the
tomb; 12and 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. 13They 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.’ 14When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing
there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you
weeping? For whom are you looking?’ 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.’ 16Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’
(which means Teacher). 17Jesus 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.” ’ 18Mary Magdalene went and
announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said
these things to her.