

Easter Sunday 2020

Good morning and happy Easter.

We are living in unique times and our lives have changed so much in recent weeks.

We are getting used to talking heads on YouTube, Zoom and others but one thing never changes and that is the message of Easter.

And the reason it doesn't change is that the central character in the message never changes.

The bible tells us Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

We celebrate that Jesus the Son of God became a man and lived among us.

We celebrate that He also took on himself all the wrongs we have ever done or will do and took our punishment for those wrongs to the cross and died a horrible death for you and me.

And we celebrate that He rose from the dead so that we could have eternal life with him.

That is the amazing reason we have Easter and it is unchanging.

Christmas is the start with the birth of Jesus a new baby and wise men and shepherds.

But it was 33 years after, that what we call Easter became the business end of his life when he accomplished all that he came to do.

Easter is often referred to as the most important event in the Christian calendar and indeed it is.

But why an important event on the *Christian* calendar? We all have the same calendar. It will say on yours Sunday the 12th of April whether you are a Christian, an atheist or whatever you believe.

CS Lewis the author who wrote the lion the witch and the wardrobe and the other chronicles of Narnia said this:

“Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance, the only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

If Christianity is true then it is the most important event ever. If it's not true

then it's ridiculous and not worth bothering about.

As a Christian people sometimes say to me such things as, oh it's nice that you find comfort in it or I'm not religious myself but don't mind anyone else having it so long as they don't try to ram it down my throat.

In other words it's all right for you but keep it away from me. But is this a correct thing to say?

I was having a chat with a man last week who said that sort of thing. I told him I spoke to Jesus and he spoke to me and you don't believe he exists.

He said yes, that's true

Therefore you think I have an imaginary friend, I said? He hadn't thought of it like that before. But when I pushed him a bit he said yes I suppose I do and we laughed.

But I don't have an imaginary friend I have a loving friend who cares for me and took my absolute mess of a life 37 years ago and gave me a new wonderful life.

So what is the message of Easter?

The bible tells us we were all separated from God by the wrong things we do and have done and there was no way we could do anything about it ourselves. No good works such as giving all our money to charity could get us right with God.

Which means we all start in the same place with no advantage or disadvantage of where we were born or brought up.

The bible also tells us that if we break any part of the law, the 10 commandments, then we are guilty of breaking them all.

If you have ever lied, put something else in your life before God or taken a pen home from work without permission in God's eyes you have broken all the commandments.

If we break the laws of the land then there are consequences; a fine for speeding or community service or prison for bigger crimes.

And the consequence of breaking God's law is no different, there are consequences for breaking it.

And the same is true of separation from God. It is the result of what we have

done.

If you climbed on your house roof to fix tiles without any safety precautions and fell off would you blame gravity? No, the fall was a consequence of your actions.

The outcome of separation from God would be living a life now and through eternity separated from God and all that he stands for, love, peace, joy, kindness etc.

Forever a life with no love, peace, joy or kindness.

But the message of Jesus is called the gospel which means good news

And this is the good news.

Jesus took all our wrongdoing, called sin in the bible, on himself and died a horrible death so that we could be set free from that sin.

He then rose from the dead to guarantee those who believe in him eternal life in his presence.

Forever a life of love, peace, joy and kindness.

So what does this mean to you personally right now. Why would God do this?

Over the years there have been many tv programmes about antiques. We have a long history in this country and many things have survived the years for us to see now.

On the antiques roadshow a team of experts set up in a part on Britain, usually a stately home grounds, and people bring their treasures to be checked by the experts.

After the checking they give what they think the item is worth, their valuation. You can see it in the eyes of the people as the expert gives his or her opinion the look which says, all very interesting but how much.

The longer the expert talks about the age, the condition and the history of the item the more they think it will be worth. Their mind goes to holidays, new cars or houses even retirement.

At the end the expert says well this could realise between £500 and £1000 at auction. You can often see the disappointment in their eyes.

But the value of anything, what its worth, is what someone will pay for it.

People pay 10 times more in London than for a similar house up north. Another programme is antiques road trip where two experts travel to a part of the country to buy antiques. They start with £200 each and look in all sorts of places for things they think will make a profit at auction.

Some they win , some they lose.

A couple of years ago the expert bought an old camera in a shop. It was priced at £80 and he got it for 60.

He then took it back to the auction where another expert said it could make a profit and may bring £120 to £150.

3 values put on it already, the shop man £80, the purchaser £60, the expert £150. So what was it worth. What someone would pay for it.

The bidding started and there was a lot on interest in the hall and online.

It went up. 100, 200, 1000, 2000, 5000, 10000, 15000 and sold for £20,000.

3 previous valuations of 60, 80, 150 were all so far out.

You may have had valuations on your life. Not in money but in worth. You may have been told you would amount to nothing. That you were a waste of space.

You may have been bullied or abused. Maybe in your own mind you are of little value, indeed worthless.

It may be that you think you are of great value to society. Your job may be important and you may be generous and kind. The good news of the gospel is for everyone.

Whatever value others have put on you or whatever value you put on yourself it is woefully short of your value to God.

The bible says that God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save it.

Forever a life of love, peace, joy and kindness.

The value God places on you and me is the life of his son. There is no greater value than that and no one is more precious in God's sight than you.

Jesus who was and is God took all yours and my wrongdoing, hurt and

sickness on himself and died a horrible death on a cross to set you and me free and give us life.

In God's eyes you are so precious and so highly valued that Jesus died for you. Not forced to die or murdered but willingly died for you and for me.

Let that sink in.

You are separated from God if you have not given your life over to Jesus and there is nothing you on your own can do about it.

So what can you do?

Jesus said about himself; i am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father God except through me.

So that is the simple message of Easter. We all start separated from God, there is nothing we can do ourselves to get right with God, Jesus took all the things that separate us from God and dealt with them He is the only way to get right with God.

You can become a child of God and start a new life.

And the good news gets even better it is available for you today, now.

What will it cost you? Well the answer is nothing and everything.

There is no money involved so no cost there. God is not going to ask you for money and neither are we. The gift of God is just that, a gift. Given by the grace of God.

Grace is getting what we don't deserve. It is getting something that we could never get ourselves. That is grace.

But the condition of a new life in Jesus is giving your old life to him and letting him live the new life through you.

It is turning to Jesus and in doing so turning away from the life you live now.

So that's the cost. You are not adding Jesus onto your life like an accessory but you are giving your life over to him completely in order to receive a better one.

That's the message of Easter and i am now going to give you the opportunity to accept the gift of a new life from Jesus.

If you now realise you are separated from God, from his love, joy, peace and

kindness and want to put it right. Then you have to lay down your own life now and let Jesus take control and give you a better life as he did for me and millions more.

Mark 1 records the start of the ministry of Jesus. The Jews were looking for a warrior Messiah to destroy their enemies and set them free from bondage. Jesus came proclaiming the gospel (good news) of the Kingdom of God.

What they missed was that Jesus did come to set them free but not from the Romans but from the bondage of sin and the law. An inner freedom which is present despite outward circumstances.

The gospel message is possibly the fairest and simplest message there is. Rom 3.23 tells us clearly that we have all sinned and failed to meet God's standards. Regardless of what we do or what we don't do we all start from the same place.

James 2.10 tells us that none of us can get right with God by keeping the law, that is impossible. We can do nothing ourselves and are all in the same place. John 14:6 tells us that Jesus is the only way to God. So simple and no need to look anywhere else.

Eph 2:8-9 tells us it is only by the unmerited favour of God (grace) and nothing to do with our efforts. An equal playing field.

Rom 5:8 tells us it is only because of the love of God. Unconditional love.

That's the good news of the gospel. Good news not good advice. News is a declaration of something that has already happened. In this case that Jesus came and took all our sin on himself and defeated it by dying on a cross and rising from the dead. But he didn't just deal with our sin he gave us his righteousness. When God looks at us he doesn't see our faults he sees his son, Jesus.

The even greater news is that it is free and available to you.

CS Lewis again:

"Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."