

Geoff's sermon for Easter Day 2013 – St Paul's Church, Kewstoke

Acts 10

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ 'We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

John 20

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.'¹⁴ At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').

¹⁷ Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Christ is Risen – So What?

It would seem that since the London Olympics all around the world, sales of Union Jacks have boomed the same goes for tee shirts, shopping bags even tea-cosies which bear the flag are going like hot cakes

but I wonder how many of those followers of fashion realise the significance of the cross of St George and red of the blood of Christ which lies in the centre of our national flag?

Whilst they may be clamouring for the flag according to the 2011 census they're not exactly rushing to sign up for the faith upon which this nation and this flag are built

According to the census only 59% of us would now describe ourselves as Christian. Whilst a decade ago that figure was nearly 72%

So when Lord Carey attacked David Cameron for failing to protect the rights of Christians it was hardly surprising to find the Secular Society urging the Prime Minister to ignore Lord Carey's challenge as "theocratic and anti-democratic blustering"

But let's not blame the Secular Society
Or given them any credit where it most certainly isn't due
For the decline in our numbers
Nor should we blame the Darwinians
Or Richard Dawkins, or Harry Potter
We only have ourselves to blame!

Looking back on old sermons the other day
I wasted the first ten Easters of my ministry
countering conspiracy theories of Dawkins and his pals

I've heard them all
"Jesus didn't die on the cross – he was just in a coma"
"The disciples passed armed guards and stole His body"
Yadda, yadda!

Well I'm not going down that route this morning
I'm assuming from the very fact that you are all here
That you believe what you recite in the creed every week

that Jesus died, descended into hell
and on the third day He rose again from the tomb
Halleluia – Christ is risen!

So if that's what we believe – why are we so afraid -
Apologetic even – about telling them out there
The Good News of Christ's resurrection?

Let me offer a few suggestions
We live in a world – and particularly in a country
Where several generations have been urged
to reject God's command to love one another
and to love one's self instead
the holy mantra these days is "look after number one"
"pull up the drawbridge, I'm alright Jack"
And the one that's been taken completely out of context
and annoys the hell out of me
"Charity begins at home"

For those of you who don't know, the expression means
That our children should learn about love, manners
And concern for their fellow beings at home, from their parents

These days many parents expect school to deal with that stuff
And threaten to sue when teacher stops dear little Wayne
From beating the life out of his classmate
or sending threatening texts on his mobile phone!

Oh yes, that reminds me of another popular mantra
"I know my rights, I'll see you in court"

Many of our younger generation
have been brought up to believe that the world owes them
Not the other way round

Bel Mooney, agony aunt for the Daily Mail writes this
“Scratch the surface of so many letters and you realise that for many people the issue is not about loving, but how to be loved. ‘Why can’t I find love?’ they ask. Of course I am sympathetic, but feel more uplifted by those letters which express the problem as, ‘I have so much love to give’. “

I’m reminded of a wedding poem,
“The art of marriage” by Wilfred Peterson, which ends
“it’s not only marrying the right person
It’s being the right partner”

Or the words of another poet, Sam Keen
“Love isn't finding a perfect person.
It's seeing an imperfect person perfectly.”

This is where today’s generation is missing out
They’re constantly fed the lie that it’s all about me
And the rest can look after themselves

they reject the gospel
because they just can’t see how anyone
could possibly go through such pain for anyone else
they’re not programmed for such selflessness

many today will say,
if life’s not a bowl of constantly airbrushed glossy cherries
it’s not fair

You might say the disciples were under a similar misconception

⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture
that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

What must happen before you can rise from the dead?

It’s like I say in the new Parish Magazine folks
Read all about it
There’s no gain without pain!

Life gets painful sometimes – that’s the way it is
Oh yes, we must constantly strive to make the world better
Finding vaccines and medicines to fight diseases
more affordable ways of farming for poorer countries

we can *reduce* suffering, but we’ll never *remove* it completely

any loving mother or grieving widow will confirm that

life can be a right bucketful some days
and we just have to get on with it
what did Jesus say? Life in abundance?

I know it can be hard
but oh what a difference - when you have a friend
who’s not just going to pat you on the back and say
“there, there, never mind”

But a real friend - who has been there
in the depths of despair
even to the depths of hell itself

what’s more He went there for you
He went there IN YOUR PLACE
and has now come back triumphant
to show you that – yes – life can be tough
but if you believe
if you will not be sidelined by all the silly arguments
of this unbelieving generation

if you believe that Jesus has been raised from death
if He was right about that
then all the things that He said about life
and the kingdom of heaven can be true too

If you’re still getting bogged down by conspiracy theories
I’ve a couple of good books I can lend you
which deal with each objection to the resurrection
and blow them away one by one

And don’t forget, if you have to have it proven to you
Then it’s no longer faith

“Blessed is He who does not see – and yet believes”

And even if – at the end of the day
you still can't believe the miracles
just take a look at the man

at a mass evangelism rally in South America years ago
thousands of men and women gave their lives to the Lord
it was such a momentous event that the world's press arrived
to see what was going on

one man who was interviewed, said this

“I don't understand how Jesus did the things He did
To tell you the truth
I'm not even sure some of these things actually happened
But I just hear the wisdom of His teaching
And the plain simple good things that He did
And I know that I could never find a better model
To set my own life by”

We may be low in numbers
But I am very upbeat about the future of the church

Shortly after I began at St Peter's
One prophet of gloom advised me
that the church would be closed in 12 months

that was 8 years ago – and St Peter's is not only still there
there are really positive signs of growth there
and just look at what's happening here

and I believe it's because – when all is said and done
at the end of the day
When they've explored every other avenue
People are seeing that there really is no better model
To set their lives by, than that of Jesus Christ

The other reason I'm feeling so positive
Is because God's timing is always so perfect

And I don't think it's by accident
That we have a new pope and a new archbishop
Arriving together

speaking of their faith so openly and with such hope

it is my prayer this Easter 2013
that we should follow that example

on Maundy Thursday his holiness said this...

*Help one another. This is what Jesus teaches us.
This is what I do. And I do it with my heart,
because it is my duty, as a priest and a bishop
to be at your service.*

*But it is a duty that comes from my heart and a duty I love.
I love doing it because this is what the Lord has taught me.
But you too must help us and help each other, always.
And thus in helping each other we will do good for each other.*

*May I wish you all
A holy and blessed Easter*

Halleluia Christ is Risen