

Easter Day 2020

12 th April Easter Day	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 31 vv 1-6 p791 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 Colossians 3 vv 1-4 p1184 Matthew 28 vv 1-10 p1000	A&M After lighting of candles, Easter Anthems p805 81 At the Lamb's High Feast <i>Gloria in Excelsis Deo</i> 459 Give me Joy 73 Ye Choirs 75 The Day of Resurrection 428 Thine Be the Glory 80 Alleluia Alleluia
12 th April Easter Day	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 31 vv 1-6 p791 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 Colossians 3 vv 1-4 p1184 Matthew 28 vv 1-10 p1000	EH 104 At the Lamb's High Feast <i>Gloria in Excelsis Deo</i> 124 Ye Choirs of New 110 Jesus Christ is Risen Today 120 Thine Be the Glory 113 Love's Redeeming Work 112 Jesus Lives!

There are people who believe that Jesus didn't die on the Cross. There are various reasons for this. Some people believe that Jesus never even existed, despite the fact that there is plentiful historical evidence that He did.

Some people are so sure that a resurrection is impossible that they think that He cannot have died if it is true that He was seen by hundreds of people alive over a period of several weeks after the Crucifixion. Another thought is that God surely would not have allowed so good a man as Jesus to die in such a terrible way and therefore would have rescued Him from death. It is true that crucified men took a long time to die. That was part of the point of such a cruel punishment, that they would be hours, even days possibly, in agony before they gave up the ghost. If someone were taken down from the cross before he was dead, it is not impossible that he could have been revived. If that were the case, though, surely the person brought back from the brink of such a terrible fate would have been in a very poor physical state – not travelling long distances, eating with his friends and preaching to crowds of people. Moreover, it was certainly not in the interests of the Roman government that a condemned criminal should somehow survive crucifixion. That is why, when the Jews asked for the bodies of Jesus and the two thieves to be taken down from their crosses because the Sabbath was coming on, Pontius Pilate ordered the centurion to make sure that they were all dead. They broke the thieves' legs because they were still breathing. Their weight would then fall on their arms, putting so much pressure on their chests that they could no longer breathe. Jesus was already dead. So they did not break His legs, but they stabbed Him with a spear to make quite sure that He had truly died. Jesus was quite definitely dead when He was taken down from the Cross.

Then there was Docetism. Maybe there still is Docetism. Docetists cannot accept that God in Christ suffered and died. Charles Wesley wrote in a much loved hymn: *'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies*. It is a mystery which docetists just cannot accept. Whereas our faith is that Jesus is wholly God and wholly human, docetists believe that Jesus is wholly God but that He made Himself look as though He were human. He appeared to be hungry or thirsty. He appeared to grieve. He appeared to suffer and die. But none of those things was real. God cannot experience change. He cannot suffer. He cannot die. Thus Jesus was in a sense

only play acting. He was God acting the part of a human being, not actually a human being at all.

Christian thinkers strongly reject Docetism. It makes nonsense of the essence of our faith – *that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. Jesus is indeed God. He is also one of us. He experiences what we experience – heat, cold, pain, pleasure, joy, sorrow, temptation. He is one of us. He fully understands us from His own experience of what it is to be human. He shares everything about us. Jesus really and truly suffered on the Cross, as you or I would suffer if we should be crucified. He was just as surely dead as one day we shall be surely dead. This is reality.

It is so important that it is included in the Creeds. *“He was crucified, dead and buried.” “He suffered death and was buried.” “And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried.” “Who suffered for our salvation.”*

Suffering, evil and death are real. We experience them. Jesus experienced them. It is sometimes only too tempting to play down the reality of death and evil. *“Look on the bright side.” “Accentuate the positive.” “If you were truly spiritual you wouldn’t mind about earthly privations.” “If you had faith, all your troubles would melt away.” “I’m OK; you’re OK”*. But our troubles are genuine. This is a difficult time for many. The corona virus is very real, very serious and is causing a lot of people real suffering. I don’t deny that there are bright sides. For some people, the lockdown is a bit of a holiday. The decline in traffic volumes has led to decreased levels of pollution. There is more peace. It is Spring. People are taking more notice of Nature. Some people are healthier because they are exercising more. The incidence of other infectious diseases is down because people are paying more attention to hygiene. Families are enjoying more time together. In my experience, people have been more cheerful than usual and more helpful. People providing health care and other essential services have shown amazing dedication and courage. All these things can be enjoyed and celebrated. We can even be thankful for them. But we mustn’t skate over the enormity of the dreadful impact this virus is having on the lives of so many people. Suffering, evil and death are very real. Jesus Himself experiences these things in fellowship with us. He genuinely experiences what we experience. This is the measure of His love.

It is because Good Friday and Holy Saturday (His agonising Death & Burial) are real that Easter Day is real. Celebrating Easter is not mere escapism. Easter doesn’t nullify the Cross. Easter isn’t pretending that there are no such things as pain and death. It is not a happy ending grafted onto a grim classic in order to boost box office revenues. Easter is real because Good Friday is real. In fact, Easter is more real than Good Friday. I often say that the Resurrection of Jesus demonstrates that love is more powerful than hate, life more powerful than death, good more powerful than evil and God more powerful than the devil. Hate, death, evil and the devil are all very real and Jesus meets with them all. But because Jesus experiences them and overcomes them by His self-sacrificing Death on the Cross, the reality of love, life, good and God are shown to be more real even than their opposites. What we are going through now in this vale of tears is very real and Jesus is with us here and now and, because He is with us, we are, here and now, caught up in the even greater reality of eternal life and abundant joy. *Rejoice the Lord is King.*