

## **Bennochy church 16th April 2017 (Easter)**

*"It's finished!"* That is what Jesus said. The work of God is now complete. There is nothing else to be done. In the big picture of God's work of salvation, the words of Jesus are true. If we take an eternal perspective, then the work of God was indeed fulfilled on the cross, in the death of Jesus. The cross has foreshadowed everything, from the creation of the world, the promise of a saviour and into all eternity. In this act, we need to believe that Easter was part of God's plan and not just a random act that took place in Jerusalem in Roman times..

The people of God certainly liked their sacrifices and that is how they expressed their relationship with God, as a people, and sought his forgiveness. It was a messy business and I think we would have been horrified at such practices. That is how people offered themselves to God and how God received their worship. It was death, blood, lots of it and I would imagine foul smells.

It is this image and idea of sacrifice, that is applied to the death of Jesus. It speaks, at that moment of history, of God's eternal compassion and forgiveness. The only difference being is, that what was offered at Easter, was understood, as God himself.

If we are talking of new life, and that is what Easter is about, then new life is a mystery. I would defy anyone to explain what actually happened at Easter. Explain to me the logic of the sacrifice. It is not part of our culture. Explain to me the theology

of Easter, beyond the actual events themselves, of how the death of one man forgives the whole of creation..

The apostle Paul was deeply influenced by the resurrection of Jesus, no doubt as a result of his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. He was clear in his own mind, that without Easter our faith is all in vain, and means nothing. At the same time, our faith in Easter cannot be based on our understanding of what happened, but only in our hope of what is yet to come. That which we cannot yet see.

Think about this. If God loved his people before Easter, then it follows that if resurrection had not yet happened, we would still be equally loved by God. God's love was there beforehand, but in the death of Jesus, we see its greatest and most complete expression. But we only know that with hind sight.

We cannot remove Easter and resurrection from our history. Our understanding of God, is post-Easter. That is the world we live in. As we look back, Easter is in some sense like a prism, a moment in time, where the love of God is focused on Jesus, as the light of the world. Jesus words on the cross, are not words that echo in the vacuum of unending darkness, they express an ending to the power of death over life and hope in a better world. If Easter has meaning, it is realised in Jesus' proclamation that the Kingdom of God has arrived.

I have to believe, that means, there is still work to do. If the work of salvation is finished, the work of the church has hardly begun. Its foundation and cornerstone, the person of Jesus himself. And it is through the world's Easter rejection, that the church came to be infused with the spirit of Jesus. That must have happened for a reason. Without Easter, we would still be living in the world of sacrifice and not spirit.

As disciples of Jesus or pilgrims of God, whatever image you are comfortable with, the cross of Easter cannot remain in the ground as a tourist attraction of what happened in Jerusalem. The empty cross now becomes a cross to be carried on our journey of faith.

*Then Jesus said to all of them, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."*  
(Luke 9: 23)

The Kingdom of God has its burdens. Jesus never promised it would be easy, but he did say, I will help you carry it. Share the load. We know the Easter cross was Christ's alone, but in a strange way, we to, share the sacrifice of Jesus, in the way God asks us to live our lives. By following Jesus, we make the way by walking.

There will always be people who think we are mad. Remember, the disciples thought the women were taking nonsense when they shared their story of what happened to them at the tomb.

They only believed, when resurrection became part of their own experience.

The work of faith is the work of God. Ours just a story to share. Our journey is to help people be amazed at the events of Easter. That new life is possible. That death is not the end. That God himself died. That love is offered to all.

*Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.*