

Sermon – Easter Day 2020

Rev. Wendy Sellers

Good morning and a very happy Easter to you all.

It seems a long time since Lent started on 26 February. I preached at the Ash Wednesday morning service and, inevitably, we considered things we might give up or take up. We talked about how Lent was a good time to get into better habits of prayer or reading the Bible.

None of us suspected that the entire country, and indeed much of the world, might be forced to give up things we wouldn't ever choose to give up - things much more painful than chocolate or cheese. Usually, when you give things up for Lent, you get to enjoy them today. But, this year, we're going to have to be patient.

Some of us, of course, have taken up unexpected things – baking seems to have become especially popular, judging by the difficulty in getting flour. Many of us have also, I suspect, spent more time consciously in the presence of the Lord than is our normal habit.

Today's reading (Matthew 28. 1-8) tells us of that very first Easter Day, when Jesus' family and friends were in the darkest place possible. The man they thought was the Messiah was dead. There was no hope at all, no joy in the world. And so the women went, at the first chance, to say their final goodbyes and carry out their last act of service to the man they called Lord. Can you imagine the change, from grief to utmost joy, when the resurrection was revealed at the tomb? God's solution to their despair was startling and totally unexpected, but it was also perfect.

And so, quite rightly, from the beginning, Easter Day has been the most joyful day in the Christian Year. A day when we throw off the seriousness and sadness of Lent and Holy Week, and celebrate the most amazing thing that has ever happened – because Jesus is risen from the dead.

Over the past few weeks most of the words passed between us – by sermon, prayer, chat or message – have reflected the current world situation. But I invite you today to celebrate.

Because it is still Easter Day.

All over the world our fellow Christians will be celebrating, all through the ages Christians have celebrated – during times even darker than these. So today there will be no mention of the v word or the c word from me.

Because, this year, more than ever, I needed to hear and celebrate the good news, I have tried to do things I usually do to celebrate Easter.



I hope you can see my Easter tree behind me, for example. It reminds us of Christmas – of the start of the Jesus story – when we also decorate a tree. It reminds us of Good Friday, when Jesus died on a tree. And the decorations on the bare twigs remind us of the core message of

Easter - that life can spring from the dead, that the dull can be made beautiful by our Easter faith.



I also always try to make a Simmel cake, as my husband Dale loves it, and I've still managed to do so this year. You are looking at the last of my self-raising flour! A Simnel cake traditionally reminds us of the disciples – it often has 11 balls of marzipan to remind us of the 12

disciples, less Judas. I've put twelve on. Because if Jesus died for all of our sins, for every sin, then surely Judas can be forgiven, too.

You, like me, may have a tree but it may be that you have other signs and symbols of Easter around your home. If so, do post them on the WhatsApp groups. I'd particularly like to see any Easter gardens.



It is no accident that Easter falls in the European Springtime – a time of new beginnings, growth and freshness. Instead of spring cleaning, I have washed and ironed my alb specially for today, and, of course, I am wearing my celebration stole. If we were in our much-loved church buildings

we would have changed the altar frontals and the veil that covers the chalice. Today, all is gold after the purple of Lent. We may be meeting virtually, but none-the-less it is time to put on the new colours of Easter and the season of resurrection. Our churches, too, would normally be dressed in flowers and foliage, looking their best after the austerity of Lent. This year, we can enjoy flowers outside, or in our homes instead. Or even pictures of bluebells sent by our friends.

I suspect, during this time of slowing down, many of us are paying more attention to the changes in our environment. I saw my first baby rabbit yesterday. So did my dog! Luckily, he was on his lead.



Now, if you are a child, the Easter bunny is a pretty important part of Easter. So, if you were hoping for a visit, I hope he made it. However, for the rest of us, here's one Easter bunny, and another, and another. Oh, and another. The thing about rabbits is they tend to swiftly multiply.

This year, the rabbit can remind us of the way things increase; of how one act of kindness results in another. One prayer or supportive message posted on social media can be 'liked' many times. Of how, in the face of adversity, we have actually increased the number of times we make contact with one another.



And, of course, it wouldn't be Easter without one of these, for centuries the ultimate Easter symbol, although they haven't always been made of chocolate. I hope you received one today. Like the flowers and the rabbits, the egg represents rebirth. Out of the egg comes a chick or a duckling, full of life and potential. We started as tiny eggs, too – and look how wonderfully we turned out. And the true Easter egg is hollow.

See!

It represents the tomb, cracked open and empty. Because Jesus is not there, he has risen.

I hope that, like me, you will today enjoy the signs and symbols of Easter around you.

I hope that, if you can, you will grasp today as a Holy Day - a holiday from what has gone on in the past few weeks.

I hope that you will speak to loved ones and eat something delicious – possibly chocolatey and egg-shaped.

I hope you will relish the new life all around us, as spring takes hold.

Because today we celebrate that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

Amen