

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
5th April 2022

READINGS

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:4-6

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

John 3:16-21

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:3-11

REFLECTION

We are entering the season of Easter and next week is Holy Week, with services each night leading up to the Praise of Easter Sunday where we can declare what is at the heart of our faith - "Christ is alive". Easter, as you may have guessed, is one of my favourite times of the Church calendar. Let me explain why.

At Christmas time there are so many expectations around the season and the celebration of Christ's birth is wrapped up with so many other thoughts, memories, hopes and excitement which make it difficult for the true love of God in the birth of Christ to shine through. At Easter however the situation is very different. The image of Jesus, the baby in the manger, is a much easier image to deal with than that of the Christ nailed to the cross, broken and bloodied. At Easter the heart of the Christian Gospel shines through and we are introduced to one of the most powerful images the world has ever known - the Vulnerable God.

The Vulnerable God is the God who shows himself not in the might of the sword or the strength of armies, but on the wood of the cross. The Vulnerable God who does not declare "Love me or else!", but rather "I love you completely". The Vulnerable God who does not hide away in heaven behind the clouds, but faces the depravity of humanity head on and saves us.

Easter touches us all in a much deeper and more personal way because Easter is about our hurts and our doubts and all the brokenness we carry within us. Easter is about every time you feel you have failed, every time you reckon you have let someone down, every time you think you have come up short of the mark. Easter is about every time you feel someone has betrayed your trust, every time you have been rejected, every time you have been mocked and made a fool of. Easter is about brokenness, the brokenness of sin, our brokenness, and Easter is about the vulnerable God who sacrifices himself to heal the hurt of that brokenness.

Easter shows us exactly the lengths and depths and heights of the God's love for us. He is the holy Creator who makes himself vulnerable for our sake.

But Easter doesn't end with Christ on the cross, its ends with the empty tomb and the challenge of the risen Christ. Easter is not merely about the death of Jesus for us, but about the life that he offers to us because of the resurrection. God doesn't just open his heart to us, he opens eternity for us, an everlasting companionship with the Father of creation. For as much as Easter is about brokenness, what emerges from the celebration of Easter is hope. A hope that is unshaken by the catastrophes of our lives. A hope that is undaunted by doubt. A hope that cannot be taken away. A hope that will not diminish or devalue. It is hope born in the love of God for us. It is hope evidenced in the death of Christ for us. It is hope proclaimed in the resurrection of Jesus offered to us.

Amen

PRAYER

God Almighty
God, Creator of all
God, of highest Heaven.

When we doubt our faith
When we wonder where you are in our times of need,
When we feel uncertain and unsure
Point us to the cross and the tomb,
Remind us just how much your love,
Just how far you are willing to go for us,
Just how much we matter to you.

Bring to life in us new faith and new hope,
New confidence in your love,
New peace that we are loved with a love without measure.
And help us to respond to you with our love,
Our devotion, our commitment.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

