

SERMON SKETCH FOR EASTER DAY 2023 | 09.04.23

Acts 10: 34-43; Colossians 3: 1-4; St Matthew 28: 1-10

Cilla Black. Scouse accent: 'Surprise, surprise'. Programme reuniting people who had lost touch with relatives many years; often adopted siblings gone overseas. Overwhelming emotion at reunion.

Maybe our lives have too few surprises In a material sense most things are on tap and we can have what we want when we want. Spend our time comparing this experience with the same thing on another occasion. Few things 'take our breath away'. We can anticipate most of our experiences. We have lost much of that 'child-like 'sense' of delight. Christmas with children is different...

For all of Jesus' friendship group, women as well as men, they had gone through the worst trauma imaginable

Emotionally there was nothing left.

None of Jesus' predictions had been remembered. Everything was black and they were all full of despair

Most of us know moments like that - times when there seems no way out of the big black hole

Mary goes to the garden but it isn't a positive thing: she is at her wits' end. It is the time when anyone saying anything at all was likely to be misunderstood

Being there for people in a time of crisis or sadness: We have tried to help someone and all we get back is fury and rage - directed at us when we are trying to be caring! We get in the neck although the problem is nothing to do with us. As if it is our fault! Explosive!

And that is the febrile atmosphere of Easter morning. In this story in St Matthew - not the most familiar version perhaps - there is even an earthquake. Internally and externally there are earthquakes. Even the natural world is upset by what has happened.

And then Jesus comes and finds them: *Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'*

Suddenly it is all different. Of all the readings shared this Holy Week, one poem really caught my attention in a new way. We read it here on Maundy Thursday evening. It is all about Judas.

Judas sold Jesus to the High Priests for 30 pieces of silver but having done that, he knows he has done the wrong thing and he is full of regret/remorse. He could not sink any lower. Judas feels he has nowhere to go and so, you remember, he hangs himself. Let me read the poem again:

Ballad of the Judas Tree Ruth Etchells

**In Hell there grew a Judas Tree
where Judas hanged and died
because he could not bear to see
his master crucified**

**Our Lord descended into Hell
and found his Judas there
for ever hanging on the tree
grown from his own despair**

**So Jesus cut his Judas down
and took him in his arms:
"It was for this I came" he said
"and not to do you harm**

**My Father gave me twelve good men
and all of them I kept
though one betrayed and one denied
some fled and others slept**

**In three days' time I must return
to make the others glad
but first I had to come to Hell
and share the death you had**

**My tree will grow in place of yours
its roots lie here as well
there is no final victory
without this soul from Hell"**

**So when we all condemn him
as of every traitor worst
remember that of all his men
our Lord forgave him first.**

Now how do we imagine Judas felt? Total euphoria. However bad he had felt - now he feels completely transformed.

That is Easter. It is the exchange of our natural propensity to see the worst - in other people and in the future.

Knowing we have been forgiven and accepted by Jesus like Judas was – we don't have to live under a cloud any longer.

No wonder the Book of Acts is full of that amazing energy:

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'

I often use the phrase: we are Easter people.

What does that mean: we are the ones whom God has forgiven and transformed.

He has come to find us - like he did Judas.

And that means he takes away our depression and our hopelessness. Life won't be easy. As we said at Beatrice's funeral on Thursday 'Death, where thy sting?' There are plenty of forces out there that want us to fail and to succumb to gloom like everyone else.

But whatever we face is underpinned by that essential confidence. Few in number, weak in skills, seemingly overwhelmed by the challenges. Jesus will come back and find us too.

And everything will work out.