

Sermon – Easter Sunday 4th April 2021



Sometimes being a church minister is a bit like being on the set of The Vicar of Dibley. Some years ago I lived and worked in Bristol and used to park at St Philip & Jacob's church in the centre of town. Everyday, I unlocked the church gates so I could drive my car in. One morning, I was unlocking the gates and noticed a car was already inside – usual since I was normally the first there at about 7am. As soon as I had taken the padlock off, the car engine started. When I swung open the gates the car accelerated towards the exit. As she got closer, I could see the lady driving, and she had a very determined look on her face which worried me a little. She continued to drive straight at me. I had to jump out of way as she sped past, beeping her horn. I thought I might have glimpsed those stickers you see on side of the WW1 Blue Max plane cockpit showing the number of

Rev. Andrew Hiscox

enemy planes defeated. I know what you're thinking - double points for a vicar. Perhaps it was a mistake, but there was not so much as one word of apology.

Apologies and saying sorry are not something we're good at, if we're honest. Either we're saying sorry for every little thing – like sorry for nudging someone in a queue - or we're not saying sorry for the things we really ought to. Often it's only afterwards we reflect and think, Ok I really ought to say sorry for that but time passes and we miss the opportunity. What I've noticed is that sometimes people do say sorry, just in their own way. What they might not be able to voice in words, they express in actions. The point is this: a physical act can express what's really in someone's heart, when words are not enough or can't be found. Some years ago I was listening to BBC R4 programme and they were interviewing a British Army bomb disposal expert in Afghanistan. The Interviewer asked why he did it, taking such a risk every day. He replied: *"I think everyone feels at some point they need to atone for something."* What that army officer reflected was that deep down we know there are times we've fallen short and we're out of sorts with the world. If we don't deal with that guilt, it can become a heavy burden. Outside we're not speaking the words, but inside we're dying to make things right.

I want to suggest to you that Good Friday is God, dying to make things right. It's a physical act that expresses what's in God's heart. It's about Jesus doing for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. I want to suggest to you that Good Friday and Easter

Sunday are not mistakes - but instead things of wonder and hope and joy. What if, instead of Good Friday being the mistaken end of a good man, in the wonder of God's plan to renew all things, it was actually a world-changing act of restoration? The possibility of a new start, for all people everywhere, no matter how much they had fallen short of God's unconditional love. Perhaps they'd failed to love their families, or took advantage of or hurt those around them, or even just struggled to love themselves. What if Easter was the physical act of God showing through Jesus Christ he could forgive us? Because only God in Jesus Christ can say, I know what it's like to be human and here is forgiveness for those wrongs, those offences against humanity and by extension against humanity's maker and father. Only someone who could represent both parties, humanity and God, could repair the breach. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Pastor murdered by the Nazis in WW2, put it: *"if Jesus was not human, how could he help us? If Jesus was not God, how could he help us?"*

Good Friday is also an act of wonder because Almighty God is able to take a physical act that was intended for evil purposes – the crucifixion - and bring good out of it. Light out of darkness. There is tremendous hope in this, because if God can do that through Jesus, what could he do through each of us? Maybe we feel like we've gone through the bleakest of times, we having our own Good Friday. Well you can have your Easter Sunday this morning, all we have to do is pray a simple pray, something like, *'Father, forgive me and help me, give me a new beginning.'*

Rev. Andrew Hiscox

Think back to that army officer, atoning for what he felt he'd done wrong. God in Jesus Christ was atoning for us, making amends for our wrongs and offering us a new start full of hope and meaning. In the wonder of God's plan, even death couldn't keep hold of the man Jesus who did this for us. That's amazing, fantastic, hope-giving, life-giving and overwhelming! – that is Easter Sunday. Alleluia! Christ is risen!

