

2024-03-31 ... 6.30pm Easter Evensong Sermon ... Revd Pippa White
Ezekiel 37: 1 – 14; Luke 24: 13 – 35

Will you pray with me? Almighty God, through the written word and the spoken word, may we know your living word, Jesus Christ our saviour, amen.

Well, happy Easter! And well done, you must all have some serious stamina if you've made it to evensong on Easter Sunday.

Just like how every year, Christmas rolls around, and preachers think, well what can I say that is new, this year Easter rolls around, and I wondered, well what can I say that's new?

So, I started by looking at the readings, I thought I couldn't go far wrong from there.

I want us to work backwards, by thinking about the gospel reading first.

The road to Emmaus - a classic, iconic part of the Bible. What, then, could I tell you all that was new?

I wonder, if you have heard the theory, that the two people walking to Emmaus, are in fact husband and wife?

If you haven't, the idea goes like this... we know that there are two people, walking away from Jerusalem, off to Emmaus. Off to the same place, which seems our first hint. Of course, you could say that they lived in the same village, but the fact that when Jesus looks set to keep walking, they 'urged him strong, saying, 'Stay with us''. 'Stay with us' - not, stay with me and my friend, but stay with us.

Well, that's a neat little idea, Pip, you might be thinking, but where are we going with this?

Where I want us to go with this, is the idea that a married couple, is quite small-scale. In terms of families, a married couple is one of the smallest sizes of families you can get, isn't it?

But, of course, the Easter story applies to them. Not only that, but they are involved with the Easter story unfurling. Sure, Jesus works with crowds of four thousand and five thousand and a crowd of 12, but the simple, small, pair of a married couple is still important to him.

Let's park that idea for a second, because I want us now to think about the first reading, the valley of the dry bones in Ezekiel. We go from the small scale of the married couple, to the huge scale, of a valley, no less.

'Mortal, can these bones live?'. And, of course, we see that they do. God declares, 'I am going to open your graves, O my people, you shall know that I am the lord, I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live'.

Just like the road to Emmaus, it is another iconic bit of the Bible. It's a classic story of God's power, of God's might, of God's ability to create and sustain and work through us. But, I wonder, if this story of a valley of bones, felt too accurate for our times right now. A valley of bones, which sounds a bit too much like our newsreels right now.

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It is, an awful fact, that around the world, as we sit here, right here, right now, there are bones and bodies piling up. In the Ukraine, in the Holy Land, in Sudan. These bones are not dry, but they are still bodies. Imagine seeing these atrocities, and being asked by God, 'mortal, can these bodies live?'

And, I'll be honest, it feels such a challenge to say, like Ezekiel, 'O lord God, you know', and to then prophesy. Because I want to turn around and say, 'o lord God, why are you letting this happen in the first place?'

Because it feels so big. It feels like it's all happening on such a big scale. Way bigger than anything I can do about it.

But, of course, it's not about what I can do, it's about what God can do. Easter, frankly, is not about what we can do, but about what God can do. It is all about God reaching through death and destruction and suffering, and yet not losing any of his goodness or light or life.

And, as we see in our readings, whether it is for two people, or for a valley full of people, God is there. God is there noticing, and caring, bringing the Easter message, whether it's two people, or a valley full.

This year, as the news on the telly and in the newspapers don't seem to get any better, but some days just seems to get worse, please remember that the Easter message, that we are here celebrating, is that darkness does not have the final word, death and evil and hate will not have the final word. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.

And it's okay if we comprehend it not, it's okay if we can't figure out how our God let's these conflicts continue, how that fits with our loving God. I'd worry for your faith if you felt like you had that figured out.

Think about that first Easter evening. That couple coming back from Emmaus, those disciples sat there, weren't celebrating, all victorious, thinking 'well that's death defeated, and the afterlife tied into a neat bow'.

No!

It was the eleven, and others, gathered, confused, exhausted, comparing notes and stories of the risen Jesus, trying to wrap their head around this stuff.

And I feel that's how we can feel now, with everything going on around us. We might be sat here, trying to wrap our head around all this stuff, tired, but hopeful, confused, but trusting in God.

But remember, even if we comprehend it not, God does. God is here, God is in those spaces where God is needed the most, noticing and caring, and bringing the Easter message, whether it's two people, a valley full, or a battlefield full. Darkness does not, and will not, have the final word, as long as we remember the Easter message.

Amen.