

Easter Day

Reading: Matthew 28:1-10

Faithful God open the Scriptures to us in a fresh and exciting way. Amen.

As we endure lockdown there has been a lot of debate about to who is actually an essential worker. I was deeply relieved when the Prime Minister came out and said that the Easter Bunny was an essential worker. I love our family Easter Bunny Egg Hunt. Quite how a bunny gives birth to eggs I'm not really sure. I must have missed that class at school.

I did hear of one vicar who was busy driving fast between all the rural churches of her parish on Easter morning. She had on board a curate who was learning the ropes. In her haste she drove over a bunny. "That's terrible," said the curate. "That was one of God's creatures." "Don't worry," said the vicar, "we vicars are always prepared." She went around the back, opened the boot and got out a little bottle of liquid. Proceeding to the dead bunny she sprinkled the water on it. As if by magic, the rabbit got up, hopped off and as it did, raised its paw at them. "That's amazing," said the curate. "Was that holy water?" "No" said the vicar, "that was *hare restorer* with a *permanent wave*."

Today the church proclaims not the restoring to life of a bunny, but the restoring to life of Jesus Christ. Matthew, our Gospel writer for this year, has an account that is bursting with signs that this is something new. It is the first day of the week after the sabbath. Sabbath for the Jews was Alert Level 4: they couldn't travel, they couldn't work, they didn't have zoom. They had to stay in their bubble. So, Jesus' close followers, two women named Mary, wait till the day after sabbath to travel because then Alert Level 4 has been lifted. They come to the tomb as soon as they can, early in the morning. It is dawn.

What greets them takes them to Alert Level 10: an angel and an earthquake. We know what that feels like, and even the guards, hardened Roman soldiers, are gripped by fear.

But the angels were essential workers because they ministered to that fear, “Do not be afraid.” they said.

Then on the road the ladies meet Jesus, the risen Christ. His message is the same. The first words from the risen Christ who has been to hell and back are “Do not be afraid.”

Matthew puts the reaction of the woman so well in just three words: “fearful yet overjoyed”. Fearful yet overjoyed.

Have you ever been fearful yet overjoyed? It's a heady mix of very raw emotion. This Easter as we face Covid 19 together we come fearful yet overjoyed.

Being fearful and then overjoyed are feelings that William Moore remembers well.

Back in May 1984 after a childhood of poverty and petty crime, William filled with self-loathing, depression and booze, broke into an elderly woman's home to steal her money. In the act of doing so he shot her.

For 16 years William was on death row, waiting his execution by lethal injection. Then one day all his fear and depression and self-hatred changed.

Two people from the local church visited him. They had a simple message. Jesus loves you and he died for you. What struck William wasn't the message so much as the love they showed him. He recounted later, “Nobody had ever shown me love before. I felt loved. Love was what I wanted. Love was what I needed.”

This encounter transformed his life. He became the peacemaker in the prison reconciling different gangs, praying with the other inmates, holding Bible studies. All the time his death drew closer and closer. The day came and they shaved his leg to put the injection in. Then the news came that changed his life from one of fear to joy. The courts had given him a stay of execution and eventually he was freed.

Today you will find him content and running a church, but he will never forget the day he was shown love.

We come to this Easter like William and like those two Marys: fearful. Covid 19 has filled our world with fear. But we are also overjoyed, because Easter tells us that nothing is greater than the love we have in God, not even death.

We discover that there is only one essential worker in this or any other crisis. And that worker is Love. It was God's love at work in Jesus Christ that brought him back from the dead. It was God's love at work in the lives of those first disciples that gave hope to the world. It was love at work in the hearts of those pastoral care visitors that gave William new life and it is God's love at work in our lives that gives us hope and joy and an everlasting home.

The one essential worker in our world is God's Love - along with the Easter Bunny of course.

Love is stronger than death, love is greater than evil. In him who loves us we are more than conquerors. Like William - Easter love has reached out to us, brought us joy and we need never be afraid again.