

Easter Sunday 2020

I wonder how you are all feeling. This is the strangest Easter I have ever experienced and I am sure I am not alone. There is no sense of excitement- chocolate eggs so not carry any joy and there is now church service to attend. Yet that is not quite true.

You see it would be very easy to think of ourselves as being shut inside a tomb- enclosed within the four walls of our houses with limited connection to the outside world. In one sense that is true. Yet I am reminded that for many people there are ways of communicating with others which we have never had before.

I remember stories of newspapers and telephone books being torn up and sewn together in one corner so they could be used for toilet paper. Thankfully the softer toilet paper is now returning to the supermarket shelves. I remember stories of people only being able to use food that they had grown yet we have an abundance of food available- we may just have to be a little creative in how we get it. I remember stories of men leaving families and walking mile upon mile going house to house trying to find a job so they might be able to feed their families. Now we have a welfare system that enables most people to be able to eat and have shelter. Finally, there is even a push to get people who are homeless into shelter if they so want it and the red tape is reduced to enable this to happen.

And into this strangest of times we come together to worship God and to spend time on Easter Sunday.

On Friday we held stones in our hands and thought of the tossing and tumbling the stones went through to become so smooth. We held water and tried to feel it and remember how it is such an important part of our lives. Today we come as we are, cleansed, renewed and refreshed from a night's sleep in a bed in our own homes. Food in the cupboards and fridges, water in the taps and safe.

Yet the sense of freedom is missing. Easter Sunday speaks to us of Freedom. It speaks about how we were caged. In the Old Testament we hear stories of how the people of Israel, the people of God, became slaves and were treated badly. Many were flogged, many died and others suffered at the hands of others. We are reminded of the stories of Moses leading people out from slavery in Egypt into the freedom of the promised land.



Usually we do not feel that we have ever been slaves but our lives have often been confined because of circumstances or because of the consequences of our choices.

We do not use the word sin very often but it is a word which is most appropriately used on Easter Sunday. You see, sin is the thing we do (or don't do) which causes a blockage in our relationship with another person- or with God. It can even be the things we say or do which prevent us from being the best we can be. And sin is something which enslaves us and keeps us captive and often we don't even know it.

The wonderful thing about Easter is that we are no longer slaves to sin. There is a part of theology which focuses on sin. It talks about how the sins we carry have been handed over to Jesus, and in doing this, he has taken the punishment for sin upon himself which ended in the cross. In the Old Testament this was picked up in the way there was a scapegoat- where the sins of the people were symbolically placed upon the goat which was then sacrificed. For the people of Israel, the image was usually with a lamb. So, Jesus was understood by many to be the lamb that was slain

for our sins. In Passover, when the blood of the lamb was placed upon the doors of the Israelite people so that the angel of death 'passed over' them then they were able to escape to freedom.

This freedom is something of what Easter means

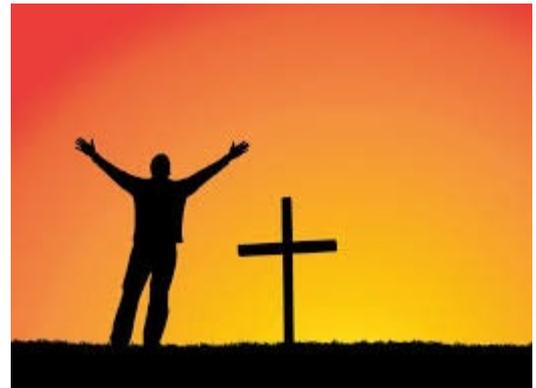
It is hard to feel free though when we are asked to confine ourselves to our homes.

Thankfully faith is about so much more than a short period of time in a lifetime. Easter freedom is about our spirits. Our spirits can never be confined within walls and can never be confined within our olives.

Our Spirits are free to worship God, to connect with others, to dream dreams and be a part of something much greater than the here and now. Freedom is the ability to spend a deep time with God- or with other people and for time to not longer matter. Freedom with God is the ability to see something with new eyes, with fresh eyes, and to appreciate the smallest of things.

Freedom in God is to know that no matter what happens to us God is with us and all else in life can fade away.

We can never be confined for we can be as free as we choose to be- respectful of the current need to stay safe and stay at home- in who we are, in who we belong to and in the one who died but whose power was greater than death itself.



God knows us and loves us. Jesus came that we might be set free. And God's Spirit is the one who keeps us, leads us and guides us beyond the here and now. We can truly sing 'Alleluia' when we know that there is nothing on this earth which can separate us from the love of God- not even Covid 19!

My prayer for you on this Easter Sunday is that you might know God's presence, that you might be set free from your worries and anxieties and that you might be able to truly sing 'Alleluia- He is risen'.

