

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I know that some of you enjoy a good quiz – and like to have your minds challenged. So here is a suitably challenging question:

“Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

It is of course a question that we cannot answer. However, we do know that one cannot exist without the other.

In the same way, we cannot think about Easter Day, without knowing something about Good Friday. They are like opposites sides of the same coin – one means nothing without the other.

We cannot celebrate the joy and wonder of the Resurrection, without knowing something of the pain and sacrifice that Jesus endured on our behalf on the cross on Good Friday. In a very real sense, Jesus died in our place, taking the punishment that should really be ours as human beings, for all the wrong things that we do – all the things that we do to spoil the world that God has given us.

But God’s love is so deep – that Jesus was prepared to die on our behalf, so that we might receive of God’s forgiveness and a new quality of life – a share in Christ’s resurrection life.

We have the benefit of 2000 years of hindsight, when thinking about the meaning of Good Friday and Easter. We are able to see both together and put them into the context of all that followed as the early church grew and developed in the light of the wonderful news that Jesus had overcome the old order of things and opened up a new way of living.

For the first disciples, however, it was different. They lived through the events as they happened. We can only begin to imagine the mixture of feelings that they experienced as they made their journey of faith

Having watched Jesus die on the cross, his disciples must have been very frightened and confused.

Although they had spent much time with Jesus, listening to his teaching.

Although he had explained to them, that he would have to suffer and die, it was only natural, only human, for them to be frightened and confused. As they met together in the Upper Room, for the first time without Jesus, they struggled to make sense in their own minds of what had happened.

It is not surprising then, that on Easter Morning, when Mary Magdalen and the other Mary came rushing from the tomb with the news that the stone had been rolled away, and that Jesus was not there, that there should have been a whole mixture of thoughts and feelings. Sadness, confusion, anger that Jesus had been taken away, and a sense of wonder – could it be, that Jesus had risen from the dead?

Then Matthew tells us that Jesus met them on their way, and gave them instructions for the disciples.

Slowly, but surely, the wonderful truth of what had happened began to sink in.

The encounter with Jesus in the garden; and later on in the evening of Easter Day, Jesus' appearance to the disciples in the Upper Room, convinced them that Jesus really had risen from the dead – he was alive again! Their lives were transformed in the light of this wonderful reality.

However, established in our faith we are – we can all experience times of doubt, confusion, and sadness, as we try to make sense of different situations we encounter in life. We all experience crucifixion moments – times when we encounter great suffering in our own lives, or we see it in the lives of others, and God can feel a long way away.

As we look around our world today, there is ongoing fighting in Syria, growing tension between North and the West, and in so many other parts of our world, where innocent lives are torn apart by war and violence, poverty or disease.

Jesus in his teaching, in the example of his life, in his dying and rising again, points us to a new and better way of living. He shows us that there is something which has the power to overcome even the greatest suffering – even the greatest hurt – and that is **love**.

If we focus on the hatred, on the pain, on the enmity and all that causes suffering – nothing will ever change.

However, if we focus on **love** – the love we are called to have for each other as human beings – slowly but surely, things can change.

If we focus on the love which brings medicine to the sick and injured; healing can replace the suffering.

If we focus on the love which offers shelter and security to the refugee; despair can become hope.

If we focus on the love which stands up for the needs of the poor and hungry in our world; light can shine even in the darkest places;

If we focus on the love which holds out the hand of forgiveness and reconciliation - someone who the world says should be an enemy, becomes another human being to be loved.

Although it is not easy, by focusing on God's call to love, a way can be opened up to new possibilities and a path can be found to forgiveness and reconciliation, even in the most difficult of situations.

By focusing on love, we find that God is right there alongside us in every situation, however difficult, frightening or confusing it might be. To share in the suffering and walk every step of the way with us.

As we celebrate Easter together this year – we will indeed know the power of the risen Lord to renew our lives if focusing on God’s healing and forgiving love, we support and help each other grow in faith and trust; and allow the excitement and wonder of what God has done through the death and resurrection of his Son to overflow into the life of our community, by each one of us saying to just one friend or neighbour – come and see.

Amen.