**EASTER 2020**

Today is a special day because I get to talk about my two favourite subjects, God and chocolate! Actually, I have a little fridge magnet on the fridge that says “Chocolate is proof that God wants us to be happy”

I love Easter eggs I can remember as a child being so excited waiting for the moment when I could snaffle it down I say ‘it’ because when I was young you only ever got one and my goodness did I treasure it.

In our house on Easter Day back in the 70’s when the weather was warm the time would come. Lunch was going down, someone was washing up, another drying and another putting the dishes away, then there would be a great gathering around the telly in time for ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ and that became the moment to crack open the Easter eggs.

I was the youngest of 7 so I was never one for eating a bit and saving the rest for later in the day, nooo …. because if you did that than more often than not it was gone, so we would all make quick work of eating them. Then about half an hour later we would all be laying around rubbing our tummies saying the immortal words, “I feel sick” and there was my mother in the background saying ‘I told you not to eat it all at once’.….. The worse thing is I’m now 51 and I still do it!

This year though it really is just the one… because neither Sam or I got to go out and choose some, although my weekly shopping buddy dear Clare from our village did manage to get one for Sam!

As ever I am always astonished at how quickly they appear in the supermarket, just before lockdown and the rush of buying toilet paper and pasta became important, there they were there in the background. Of course, under usual circumstances they would normally be taking up a massive amount of space, great sweeping supermarket aisles all pretty and bright, so much choice often to the point where I never know where to start!

Trying to choose the right one is never an easy task, last year I decided that Easter eggs are a bit like people, all the big extravagant ones are almost always hollow, looking good on the outside, but inside they are always empty!

But the dear little Cadburys Crème egg, and it is little, is full from top to bottom and actually has quite a lot to give other than just tooth ache!

And this got me thinking, what kind of egg would a Christian be?

Can you guess?

Well have you seen these little eggs called Kinder surprise?

They are so called because right in the middle of them there is a little surprise, well a little toy actually.

Now the first thing to know about kinder eggs, is they don’t just come out at Easter they are in the shops all year round, the second thing to know is the chocolate is very amenable and has the ability to bring both dark and light together, and thirdly it offers you something that you can keep forever if you so wish!

But it’s this element of surprise that makes the kinder egg so enjoyable and it’s here that we find a similarity with the Easter story.

After the horrors leading up to Good Friday, can you imagine the surprise of finding the empty tomb, with empty linen, the surprise of seeing angels, the surprise of finding out that Jesus wasn’t the gardener… the biggest surprise of all finding out that Christ had stuck to his word and had risen again! Wow!

That gift of eternal life really is the biggest and best surprise of all.

Because the biggest fear we hold in life, is death, when we think of those

that we have loved, and lost, it brings back so many emotions, the pain of separation between yourself and a loved one, is the greatest chasm you will ever bear.

So, the thought, that someone, some divine entity, could take that away, is a pretty awesome gift for humanity to receive. When Christ hung upon that cross, in agony, he bore the sins of the world, so we don't have to.

In his act of suffering and death, he opened the gates of eternal life. And heaven became accessible and real to us all! Jesus said “I go and prepare a place for you; that where I am, there you may be also. In other words, when

he cries out from the cross, “it is finished”, what it really means is that part of his mission is complete, so we can never be finished.

Today I sit here and celebrate with all the company of heaven,

all those who are with you in your hearts and minds apart in body yet together in soul we all stand together, and it is because of this that we celebrate and give praise, in Christ Jesus, our Lord, the one who's Kingdom is not of this world, but the one who's kingship is. On this Easter Day, be joyful, be the happiest you have ever been, because know this, Christ is risen, and because he rose again, so we, and all who we have loved, rise with him.

We will never know this side of heaven, why Christ was slain in such a way for us to have eternal life, but what we do know on this side of heaven, is we have been given a promise that death is not the end. We have been given a promise, that God’s love is bigger than the complexities that death brings.

So today, when we celebrate Easter, what we really celebrate is that Christ loves us, unconditionally, in this world, and the next! So whichever side of the veil we stand, we all stand together, under God’s great love and eternal protection. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The Easter story is one of those stories that despite the misery of Holy Week, and Good Friday, really does have a happy ending. And it's an ending that continues, right into eternity.  The cross tells us how much Jesus Loves us, remember that famous visual statement - Do you want to know how much Jesus loves you? This much! *Open arms*

He opened wide his arms on the cross, to bring light into our darkness, beauty into our wastelands, despair into hope, to bring love where none exists, to offer joy in place of sadness, victory in place of defeat, and to turn our cemeteries into places of hope, you get what I’m saying? He turned emptiness into fullness. When we celebrate Easter, we are really celebrating the moment when Christianity began, the moment when Christ showed his disciples the real power of God, the moment when he proper gave the world hope!

Jesus Christ entered into our humanity at its worst and offered his very best, and when he died he left this amazing legacy of love and hope.

But the surprise of Christ doesn’t stop there, because his legacy has been passed on to us, it is now our job to bring the surprises and there is nothing more satisfying than seeing the face of someone who has just received a random act of kindness, or for whom someone has gone the extra mile for another or the first time that someone experiences real sacrificial love! These are the surprise gifts of Easter that continue to change the world.

In John Masefield’s drama The Trial of Jesus, there is a striking passage in which the Roman centurion in command of the soldiers of the cross comes back to Pilate to hand in his report of the day’s work. After the report is given, Pilate’s wife beckons to the centurion and begs him to tell how the prisoner died. When the story had been told, she suddenly asks, “Do you think He is dead?” “No, lady” answers the centurion, “I don’t” “Then where is He?”

She says, to which the Roman replies, “Let loose in the world, lady, where...no one can stop His truth.”

And so, as we gather together on this Easter Sunday let us be reminded that God chooses to be right here right in the middle of all our troubles and traumas, his journey through Christ was real and solid and his message was one of continual hope and unconditional love. But it is also an invite for us to take action, to be transformed by his grace to become the people that he wants and needs us to be.

And to help you understand what I mean I shall return the lowly kinder egg. I like to play with words and grammar and so when I ask you to be a kinder egg, it is the same spelling as being a kinder egg!

The real message of resurrection day is two-fold, one that our transcendental experience is changed forever through the gift of eternal life and secondly that the temporal experience is changed forever by the gift that Christ left within us. So, let that great message of resurrection come alive in you, so his legacy may become real and together we can show the world that Christ has truly risen! Amen