

## Holy Week & Easter 2017

Dear Friends,

'Post-truth'... word of the year? Usage of the adjective during the recent US election and the referendum here in the UK last summer made it the in-word for 2016. The Oxford Dictionary defined it as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". Sometimes, it feels like it is referring to statements that are not even true in any sense!

'Fake-news' is another term much heard these days! Now, some news may be fake and we need to be diligent in checking the sources of information presented to us as true, but the allegation of 'fake news' seems to be made by someone about news stories which disagree with the speaker's own opinion.

For those of us who spend much of our time speaking of 'good news' or gospel, it is quite a challenge to live in a world of 'fake news' or 'post-truth'! For some, the story we tell is 'fake news'.

Actually, this isn't a new problem. One of the key events in the Holy Week Gospel narrative has Jesus before Pilate, the Roman Governor in Jerusalem. Presented with an early morning clamour for a judicial execution, Pilate found himself questioning Jesus. In the midst of the trial, Pilate asks the question 'What is truth?'

It is a question we do well to take seriously. Many people simply accept as truth that which they are told, even within the Christian community. I think it is interesting that when asked which was the most important religious law, Jesus added a phrase to the ancient concept expressed in the 'first law', 'Love the Lord you God with all your heart, soul and strength'. To this Jesus added 'with all your mind'. Christians do not need to fear thinking things through and exploring the evidence of and for the gospel – indeed, we are required to do it!

So, this year, when sharing in the great story of Jesus from Palm Sunday to Easter Day in services or devotions, processions or celebrations, don't forget to bring your mind to bear on the events that took place and what they might mean. The story is not always as straightforward as we sometimes think. The gospel writers were not simply telling a straightforward tale. The gospels we read and the stories we enter each year were written for different purposes and used a range of different material, but within it all the story of Jesus can be traced with real power and intensity. In a 'post-truth' and 'fake-news' world, we need to be able to give a reason for the faith we hold. There is an emotional appeal and personal belief in the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but there are objective facts, which underlie the emotional appeal, to explore too.

This year will be the 34<sup>th</sup> and last Holy Week & Easter season I'll share with local churches as 'their' minister - a period longer than the life-time of Jesus of Nazareth! Holy Week and Easter have always felt as if they are pivotal times in the calendar. How the different churches kept the time from Palm Sunday to Easter Day has felt like a real indicator of their life and vitality. For some there have been the traditional services marking the main days of the week, for others there have been daily devotional activities. Some events have been in the gathering darkness at the end of a day, others have been at the breaking of dawn.

There have been children's activities and events in the community, from Good Friday processions with a cross to full-blown community re-enactment.

For me it has always been a season rooted and grounded in a profound truth, there are real events here and they point to still deeper truths. The events of Holy Week and Easter reflect and explore the reality of life as it is. They point to the God who is intimately involved in that reality. The Jesus, who we find God's love at work in, invites us to enter his story anew and find truth, hope and new life too.

How will you keep Holy Week and Easter this year? I hope the season will be as rich an experience as ever.

With every blessing

Peter S. Clark