

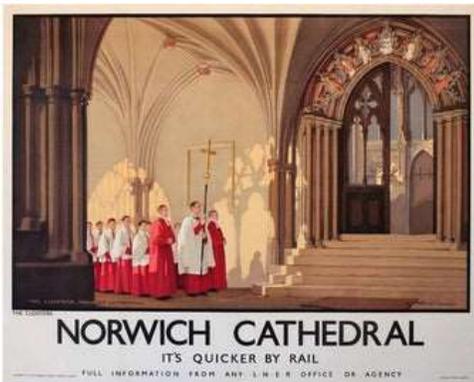
## SERMON, EASTER SUNDAY 2021 – FOR CHURCH



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I keep a diary, and looked back to see what I did last year. This is what I wrote:

“+Libby was starting the day with a live broadcast at 5.30 am. I did not tune in. I was up soon after 7 and went across to St Edmund’s to get a photo of the Easter Candle outside church. Geoff Howell took one of St Matthew’s from the safety of his house. I walked 2 miles round the garden while listening to *An organ fest for a silent Easter* on BBC Radio 3. In the afternoon I did another 2 miles while listening to Festal Evensong at Norwich. Then we cooked a lasagne.”



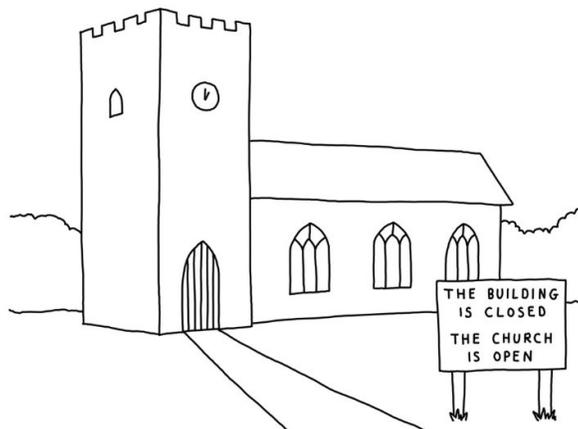
None of us expected that the following Easter would still see so many restrictions. I take some comfort from the fact that, as far I can see, +Libby did not start today with a live broadcast at 5.30 am. I take some more comfort from the fact we can light Easter Candles in our churches, that church and Cathedral organs are being played, and that – although a choir of five can’t manage Dyson in D, Blessed be the God and Father (S S Wesley) and Stanford’s Te Deum in C – we do have music. Since today is a work day, I will go for a Croots meat pie, and save the Lasagne for tomorrow – one of the benefits of this last year is that my cooking has vastly improved.



But last year I noted that 9,875 people had died of Covid – now the figure is pushing 150,000, and that’s just in Britain. 2.8 million across the world. I cannot, we must not, pretend that all is over, that we’ve survived and now we can get back to normal. There are church buildings across this country that have not reopened today, and many of them will never reopen – and, much more importantly, there are men and women who have suffered so much, that their lives will never be the same again. Some who had faith will have lost it, and some are so broken by all they have experienced, that they see no hope for the future.



We dare to believe that Christ is risen. That the women went to the tomb, and found it empty. We dare to believe, although Mark doesn’t include it in his gospel, that the men went to the tomb as well. We dare to believe that Jesus appeared to Mary in the garden. We believe that their lives were transformed. We believe that the Risen Christ appeared to many more, we know that they spread the gospel, the good news, and that hundreds of years later, Christians started worshipping in our communities, built our churches, and we know that Christians continue to worship, and have worshipped even in this last year when churches have been shut.



We know that in the last year Christians have done amazing things – as individuals and as churches. We have worshipped and prayed. We have listened and cried. We have welcomed and celebrated, we have baptised and married, we have also mourned. We have taught our children, and supported our adults. We have phoned and chatted and written letters and zoomed. We have fed the hungry, and fought against injustice, we have stood against corruption and evil – we have made a difference.



And the power of love, which I do believe is the power of the Risen Christ, is a power far wider than the churches, a power witnessed in men and women of religious faith, and in men and women who do not profess religious faith. We have seen that symbol of faith, a rainbow, in so many aspects of life. We have seen men and women sacrifice themselves in love and care of others – in some cases quite literally. Many more have suffered and fought, and will bear the scars for the rest of their life. There is much to be proud of in the human race, the race made in the image of God.



Yet some men and women have got extremely rich because of Covid. Some have made huge profits, vastly increased their wealth, exploited others, watched others suffer and die – and they seemingly have no conscience as they do so. In some ways the Kingdom of God seems as far away as ever. And I'm sure I'm not the only person in this church who has a healthier bank balance now than I did a year ago. How am I going to use that additional money? How do we use it for the good of God's Kingdom?



Mark's gospel ends, or at least, what we think is the original form of Mark's gospel, ends with a strange sentence:

“So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

In this gospel the resurrection of Jesus is so mind-blowing that the reaction is terror, amazement and fear. Yet those Christians kept going, kept exploring, found deeper faith, shared that faith with others, and they continued to transform the world and bring in God's Kingdom.

We've had a year of “terror, amazement and fear” and, to be honest, it's not over yet. We will also seek to keep going, keep exploring, deepen our faith, share our faith with others, and work with others to transform this world and bring in God's Kingdom. To him be praise and glory, Amen.

Peter Barham, Good Friday 2021