



Easter.....

from the inside

2007

Easter..... *the inside story*

We can treat the Easter drama as one we watch from a distance, the distance of time or the distance of the space between actors and audience. Separated by time, we can question the relevance of the events that occurred so long ago; separated by the stage curtain we can treat the story objectively and demand to be convinced. But in the events of Holy Week, and the adventures and insights of people and prophets that coloured their interpretation, there is something personal and intimate. Faith speaks to faith. Secrets are shared. We are invited into the inner circle, ushered behind closed doors. We even find ourselves tuned into Jesus' own wavelength. This is Easter from the inside, when we are auditioned for the part we are to take as the great drama of salvation continues to be played out in the times in which we live and all the times to come until the harvest of the Kingdom of God.

Palm/Passion Sunday *Inside the prophecies* **Luke 19:28-40**

This enduring picture of Jesus riding into the city signals the start of the final countdown. What did Jesus intend, what were the disciples thinking, what went through the heads of the bystanders, what shaped the telling of the incident? The 'choreography' seems to have been from the prophecy in Zechariah (9:9) which sees a messiah whose power is tempered by humility. Spreading garments was a spontaneous gesture of respect (see the welcome to the king in 2 Kings 9:13). 'Hosanna' ('save now'), with its ritual shaking of foliage, was remembered from the psalm sung at the feast of the tabernacles (118). 'Blessed is he' is in a later verse of that psalm, a welcome to pilgrims going up to the celebrations. It was not until the story had run its course, through Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost, that the many strands of this incident would come together to reveal the true nature of the servant king and what he asked of his followers. Our Christian growth is similarly punctuated by events not fully understood at the time but which strengthen, pattern and illuminate our path of discipleship.

Easter—*from the Inside*

In 2007, Easter Sunday is April 8

Written by the Rev Douglas Galbraith, Chair of the Church Life Network of ACTS and interim Ecumenical Officer of the Church of Scotland.

Graphic used with the kind permission of Milford Baptist Church, New Zealand.

Leaflet designed and produced by: ACTS , 7 Forrester Lodge, Inglewood, Alloa FK10 2HU

Easter Sunday *Inside things hidden*
Isaiah 25:6-9

It is not just the closing words ('We have waited for him; let us Rejoice in his salvation') which make this passage jump out as the light from Easter pans across the pages of the Old Testament. There is also its moving picture of peace and (shared) plenty, which seems to pre-echo the new reconciled state of creation achieved through Christ's Passion and Resurrection. From the book of prophet Isaiah, this passage is quite different from the usual kind of prophecy found in its pages, namely the fearless verdict of insightful people on the likely outcome of events if a present course of action were pursued. Our extract, however, may be described as an 'apocalyptic vision', employed to address the sort of situation so potentially destructive that the only solution is 'hidden' from the normal course of history. A bolder kind of prophecy, familiar to readers of Daniel and Revelation, it goes 'outside the box' and portrays the disintegration of the present evil world and the birth of an entirely new and different one. Compared to general Old Testament prophecy, to which in retrospect one might say 'I told you so', such a future is totally unrealistic, incredible, pure wishful thinking. Not any more.

Monday *Inside the sufferer*
Psalm 31:9-16

The tradition of the up-beat gospel dies hard. Surely the Christian faith should instil a positive approach to life! 'Mustn't grumble' is our watchword. In a psalter once influential in part of our tradition, from the 'selection of psalms most suitable for use in public worship' today's verses, the words of someone at the end of his/her tether, are entirely omitted, clearly 'not suitable'! Today, however, we are turning again to such frank talk before God. Globally aware, we cannot see how to extricate ourselves from the cycle of war, disease, poverty, and the poisoning of the air. Our spiritual searchings seem to reveal our unbridgeable alienation from life and God. To be able to sing or speak a psalm like this, to be able to lament for ourselves and others, is a step towards rebuilding faith in God and in our fellow men and women.

Tuesday *Inside the wavering disciple*
Luke 22:54-62

The vividness of this and other narratives of the events of the Passion have the ring of being first person accounts, not least this leaked report of the preliminary hearing before the Sanhedrin. If Peter is the reporter of the incident in the courtyard, it says a lot for his honesty and the strength of his subsequent discipleship. The fact that he was there at all, unable to leave Jesus unattended, shows a consistency between the Peter who denied and the Peter who was martyred. The way the incident escalates and the rising panic of the central figure are well caught. The 'pull' of the story for us is its reminder of how easily we can be drawn into giving the opinion or judgement or vote that is expected of us. When we subsequently have the time to reflect and to take stock we often find ourselves sharing Peter's distress. For Peter, the later knowledge of the presence of the Risen Christ came to make all the difference, embraced all the more because he knew himself to be part of the problem. At this time of the Christian Year, we submit ourselves to honest scrutiny so that we may re-emerge as Easter people.

Wednesday *Inside the mind of Jesus*
Luke 22:39-45

It is so easy, given our knowledge of the outcome, to underplay the turmoil, the ugliness and the horror of Gethsemane, aided and abetted sometimes by the sentimentality with which these incidents have been depicted in art and in musical setting. But at his point, the outcome is not assured. Luther commented: 'no-one feared death as much as this man'. It was not so much the fact of death, perhaps, as Satan of the Wilderness's return match for ultimate supremacy (see John 12:3). In Karl Barth's words, 'the bill is being presented ... it was one thing [for Jesus] to enter and continue on this way, it was another to tread it to the end, and in this world its necessarily bitter end ... From this we may gather something at least of the convulsion of that hour'. The more that with Christ we wrestle with the juggernaut-proportions of the evil and injustice endemic in so many of our social structures as well as the outright exploitation and cruelty between person and person, the readier we become to embrace Easter.

Thursday *Inside the upper room*
Luke 21:7-19

It is as we sit at supper with our Lord that we as a Church most know who we are, knit together into the body of Christ, each with our unique gifts to offer. Our sharing of bread and wine is as if we ourselves were in that upper room, closely identified with the great reconciling act of God in Christ towards the world. The gospel writers place this meal in the tradition of the passover, the meal of freedom, but this time not simply recalling the past but patterning the future. Our Communion meals are coloured also by other meals with Christ, on the beach, in the upper room, on the road to Emmaus, where the mood is one of joy at the presence of Christ risen. The sheer physical nature of the Meal offers a powerful pattern and paradigm which secular society can potentially recognise, and one that can carry the message of reconciliation right to the heart of a broken world.

Good Friday *Inside the oppressor*
Luke 23: 13-25

There is a scene in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* where the cry, 'Let him be crucified', is set to a jagged, chromatic theme, with the voices arranged so that the words tumble over each other in their vehemence. It is an ugly sound, full of self regard and bluster, and yet all the skill of a great composer has gone into achieving the effect. We too easily assume that injustices are the result of thoughtlessness. Yet it can be people of gifts and skill who are the instruments of anguish and dispossession. The bomber can also be a caring family man, a torturer, a favourite with his grandchildren, a demagogue a person of learning. Aggression may be undertaken in the name of greater prosperity for all. Even under the guise of religious rectitude we can dismiss and devalue those for whom Christ also died. It is all too easy for us to set limits to our love, or filter out the information which does not accord with our chosen standpoint,

Saturday *Inside the outsider*
Luke 23:32-43

The announcement of the crucifixion is almost casual, a single line in a list of information. How ordinary cruelty can be, all in the day's work! And the taunts continue. It is the mockery which brings it home to someone that he/she is now, suddenly, of no account. There is no dialogue in mockery. The perpetrator is secure behind the law or shielded by the many. Facts are wrenched from their context and twisted into a new, ugly shape. The strain of retaining a basic level of sympathy for our fellows can collapse as perfectly honest, decent people let down their guard. In this case, as so often, the taunts contained more of the truth than those shouting from a safe distance intended. Many sermons and many martyrdoms were necessary before the idea of a Saviour who made the experience of the excluded the perspective from which to re-order society could become more commonplace. The fact that the idea is still the cause of ridicule only serves to underline the continuing urgency of the Church's mission today.