

Heavenly Father, may we meet the risen Christ in word and sacrament today. Amen

- What the best thing about Easter?
  - For many people it might be a four day weekend. A chance to queue for hours on the M1 or at Stanstead in order to travel to see family.
  - For others it could be linked with the seasons. A good time to get outside and enjoy a beautiful spring day.
  - If I ask the question in a school assembly, I'll almost certainly get the answer 'chocolate'.
  - But for Christians, there is a different answer. For us, here today, the best thing about Easter is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, risen from the dead.

- Today, I want to use one of the other answers to talk about why Jesus rising from the dead is so important. I don't want to take you to a large queue at the airport. Instead I've got a cream egg.

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Q Why do we have Easter Eggs ...wait for answers

- Yes not bad. I've heard 5 different reasons in my time as vicar

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- The first one is that it represents the stone that was rolled across the tomb where Jesus was laid.
  - It was proof that he had really died and put there to stop people faking he had come back to life. It was huge and Jesus really was dead, wrapped in grave clothes and shut away.
  - His disciples were frightened. They'd run off and hid. The light of the world had been extinguished like a candle on a windy day. And apparently nobody cared except a few brave women who had come to visit the tomb. That's what you do when someone you love has died. It helps. Mary Magdalene came to the tomb very early on Easter morning, whilst it was still dark. You can't beat death but at least it shows you haven't forgotten.
  - The cream egg representing the stone!

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- The most common reason for the egg is that it stands for new life.
  - We think of baby chicks, small unsteady lambs and cherubic babies.
  - That's great, but it rather takes the power out of it.
  - Mary Magdalene reached the tomb and found it desecrated. The stone was shoved out of the way and the tomb was empty apart from some folded grave clothes.
  - The horror must have been indescribable. Was there no end to this nightmare? Who could be so appallingly cruel as to steal his dead body? It was only after Jesus spoke to her that the real truth began to dawn on her. Somehow he was alive. Risen from the dead. Speaking, breathing, walking and very, very real
  - I like that moment when you bite into a cream egg (BITE) and feel the substance of the thing. It's not hollow. It's got substance. Tears of horror turned to tears of joy.
  - And slowly over the next years Mary Magdalene discovered the power of God to bring new beginnings, new life out of hopeless circumstances. Forgiveness out of guilt. Life out of death. Life after death! Hope out of despair and meaning out of the confusion of daily life. And Jesus did it first when he beat the power of death on Easter Day.
  - So when you next feel hopeless or that life has no meaning, remember the cream egg, the new life of Jesus, the resurrection and remember the power of God to transform everyday sadness into something wonderful. He did it first with his Son, Jesus.

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- Imagine the look on Mary Magdalene's face when the truth dawned on her? Jaw-dropping or what?

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- The third reason people sometimes give for Easter eggs is that it represents a mouth open in astonishment.
  - And that's quite understandable. Because this is God doing the impossible!
  - Do you have experience of God doing the impossible in your life?

- Healing relationships? Answering prayers? Pointing you in new directions? Allowing you to see new beginnings out of hopeless circumstances? That's resurrection! Watch out for it. Open your eyes and look!

- Because the next amazing truth is that nobody is excluded. You don't have to be good or wise or born into the right family. You just have to be you. Nobody is excluded!
- Mary Magdalene was about the last person you would choose as a reliable witness. Dubious past, female, shunned by everybody who considered themselves respectable. But not by Jesus. Picked out by Jesus, who was not in the least respectable, to be the first to discover. The disciples didn't believe her. They had to come and prove it for themselves.

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- The egg can also stand for the number zero – meaning nobody is excluded. Everybody is involved. Perhaps especially those who society ignores. Those sort of people were the ones Jesus chose to spend time with.
- In the reading you'll hear at communion, Peter discovers this. '*God shows no partiality*'. It's not just the Jews who are saved. '*Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*'
  - That's Mary Magdalene, you, me, the bloke on his phone, and the woman pushing a pram.
  - The Kingdom of God is the only Kingdom with totally open borders. Refugees and migrants like you and me, streaming in from all sides. All accepted. All cherished. All important. All with a work permit to work for the Kingdom. All introduced and supported by their loving, living Saviour.

- So an Easter Egg may stand for five different things in popular imagination. We've heard four of them: the stone that covered the tomb, new life, an open mouth of amazement and the number zero. There's one to go. Because the Easter Egg is for eating. The fifth reason I'm often told we have Easter Eggs is that they taste nice.

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- It's not something you put on the shelf and admire. It's something you get stuck into, whether you nibble it carefully over the next three weeks or you cram it all in in one day.
  - And actually that's the same with Jesus. He's not someone who you can safely leave as a number on your phone but never bother to call except when you're in real trouble.
  - That's a bit like texting a stranger when you need some help. They may reply or they may not. How do you know you can rely on them.
  - No, if you want Jesus to change your life like he changed the life of Mary Magdalene and Christians all over the world, then you have to talk to him. Often. Get to know him. And allow him to fill your life with his love ... BITE ... influencing you, guiding you, giving you eyes to see him at work in this terribly troubled world. Like the taste of milk chocolate after a six week fast called Lent!

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- Do it through the bible. Do it through sharing a meal at communion. Do it through talking to him. Do it through talking about him with other Christians, and you'll find, almost without noticing it that you are living in his Kingdom here on earth. His new life really has changed yours. That's resurrection!
- Here at St Mary's we do our best to live resurrection lives, changing life little by little, focussed around Jesus' love for you and me. We do it by supporting refugees, responding to the threat of climate change, caring for the elderly and vulnerable, guiding the young and trusting that whatever situation we are in, the living risen Jesus is by our side. Do join us and discover more.
- So that's all about Jesus and all about Easter Eggs. For a prize of a cream egg can anyone remember the five reasons we eat eggs that I talked about today?