

Vicar's Pastoral Letter

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Subject : The significance of Good Friday and Easter and the freedom they bring us all.

Dear Friends,

Each year on Good Friday at 10:30am there is a service at St. Denys' Church called "Good Friday Praise." I was recently asked by someone "but why have a Praise Service on Good Friday? Surely that day of all days is a sad day and one for quiet reflection." We do, of course, have a service of meditation in the afternoon but I fully understood what this person meant. The name itself "Good Friday" seems inappropriate as on that day Jesus suffered unspeakably and died and the forces of evil appeared to triumph. It is, however, not the pain that Jesus endured that we praise and celebrate but the fact that He was willing to undergo it on our behalf and in order to set us free from the consequences of our sin and alienation from God. It is "Good" not because of what happened but why it happened.

On that dreadful day following the crucifixion and death of Jesus we are told that the curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. This "small" event in comparison to the drama unfolding on Calvary was probably witnessed by just a handful of people and only occupies one verse in the Bible account and yet it provides the key to understanding the true meaning of it all. The Temple Curtain was what separated the altar and the "holy of holies" from the rest of the building and only the High Priest could go beyond the curtain for that is where the presence of God was thought to dwell in an unadulterated form. The ordinary people, mere mortals, you and I, were never allowed to go near this holiest of places. But the death of Jesus changed all that for ever because there was no longer this separation between God and His children and we now have free and uninterrupted access to the presence and Love of God at any time and in any place. No event could have been more symbolic than the tearing of that curtain for the barriers between us and God had well and truly been demolished and for all time.

The other evening I watched a programme about life in Communist East Berlin prior to the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. This was to mark the end of Communism in East Germany and the tearing down of that infamous Wall that took place 20 years ago. It was fascinating and heartbreaking to hear people's reminiscences of life behind the Iron Curtain for although there was terrible cruelty, poverty and injustice there was also the security of being guaranteed a roof over your head, a job and a wage however meagre. In the free and Democratic society that now exists such securities can no longer be guaranteed and there was a good deal of nostalgia for the old days behind the Wall. One lady remarked "we certainly didn't live in mud huts and I have to say that I didn't mind the Wall at all."

We can very easily get used to living behind walls and indeed curtains, whether the Temple Curtain or the Iron Curtain, provide a real sense of security. You know who and what you are and you know your limitations because they're imposed upon you. Freedom is different and it's all together more challenging because it demands that you use your freedom wisely and that you have far greater responsibility for the choices you make.

In celebrating Good Friday and Easter Day you're celebrating the freedom that Jesus won for you in breaking down the barrier between you and your Father God. The whole of Christianity is a celebration of Freedom and Choice: the freedom to come into God's presence and to fully receive His Love knowing that your sins are forgiven and the Choice of choosing to accept that freedom and to live your life the way that God wants you to live it. It is very tempting to continue to live in the security of sin behind the curtain rather than have the courage and faith to live in freedom beyond the confines and yet it is to freedom that we are called and for freedom that we are born.

The call of Good Friday and Easter is the call to be free: "free to worship God without fear all the days of your life." Will you accept that call and venture beyond the wall of your limitations? Do you want a new life of freedom and choice and the dignity and responsibility that goes with it? Jesus

said "If the Son of God shall set you free then you will be free indeed!" The people of East Berlin celebrated that freedom 20 years ago when the Iron Curtain was torn and the Berlin Wall torn down. The whole of humanity celebrated that freedom 2,000 years ago when the Temple Curtain was torn and the barrier between us and God destroyed for ever.

A Very Happy Easter to all of you and every blessing.

Peter

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