

## Monday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2022

'I'm delighted to let you know that my dream job as chaplain to Ipswich Town FC is to become a reality. It's a new venture that I'm incredibly looking forward to though obviously it will be a wrench to leave Alnwick after so many years'.

That's what I wrote on social media on the morning of Friday 1st April. Many people realised straightaway that the post was untrue but some didn't and took a while to work it out and - if I'm honest - some still think I'm leaving for Suffolk imminently with comments such as 'what a shame, you've only just sorted your house out' and 'what a miss you'll be'. Which is all very kind so perhaps I'll get round to telling them soon. Mrs F just incidentally simply had a waving emoji with the one word response 'Bye'. Just my dream then! But one reaction was from one of the coaching team for junior harriers who was initially taken in by it and exclaimed 'this cannot be happening. Please don't go'.

Two weeks ago, I was sat on our front patio drinking my essential flat white, reading CDP whilst watching the sun - the warm sun - rise in the sky. 'Spring has sprung' I said to myself. A week later, I was not sat on my patio but rather parked on the sofa with a hot water bottle for company as I looked out on the titian one wrapped up in winter coat (recovered from the loft) with hood up trying not to slip in the midst of a snowstorm. I shook my head and said 'this cannot be happening. When will winter pass?'.

Last night I sat watching the news and the horrific events in Ukraine that continue to dominate the headlines. The unbelievable and tragic loss of civilian as well as military casualties from the very young to the very old. Five weeks ago, a democratic, peace keeping country in central Europe was invaded and the horror of war is there to see. 'This is April 2022 I thought, 'this cannot be happening. When will good triumph over evil'.

As we approach Easter week, with the benefit of hindsight we know what happens next but those present at the time didn't. When Jesus declared to his disciples that he needed to die, they in effect said 'please don't leave us, who shall we go to?'.

On Palm Sunday, the sun was surely warm in the sky that greeted the day their master was welcomed with triumphant voices to Jerusalem where palm branches waved and hallelujahs sung in His way. Only days later the sun was banished in an instant as darkness played out over Calvary and this time the terrible sound of harmful lashes flayed and 'hail king of the jews' spat in his face. Huddled as the disciples were for fear of the authorities, their silence spoke to 'but we thought the darkness of winter was past, what happened to the hope of spring?'.

With the news of Easter Day still to reach them, the two on the road to Emmaus would dejectedly question their new companion: 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is

more, it is the third day since all this took place'. Good should have triumphed over evil.

I suspect you, like me, have spoken the words 'this cannot be happening' in recent days and weeks. It may be a personal pressure perhaps family or work related or something in community that breaks your heart as well as global events. Nevertheless, we are left shaking our heads in sadness, disbelief and righteous indignation.

In the midst of this heaviness and confusion and desperation we find Easter. A week like no other which plays out like a roller coaster of emotions, from mountain top euphoria to slough of despond dysphoria before the victory snatched from the jaws of death that is just stunningly miraculous and hope filling and life giving and awe inspiring.

When the two on the road to Emmaus were reeling from the events of the crucifixion, they were perplexed, saddened and dismayed that the good they saw in Jesus had not overcome the evil regime in charge. And yet in the words of Samuel Lockridge... it's Friday but Sunday's coming.

And it is because the Ultimate Good in Jesus has overcome the tyranny of evil that we can and indeed must believe that love and peace must find a way to be established once again in the 'now' of God's kingdom on earth.

As much as I wish we could go from Palm Sunday to Easter Day without any of the pain, the reality of Easter is that Jesus must die for the victory over the grave to happen. We cannot have one without the other.

As you move through Easter week, I encourage you to take time to be present in each day. Don't rush through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday to get to the 'good bit'. Sit with the suffering, the pain, the isolation, the emptiness for in so doing, the glory and hope of the resurrection will be all the more meaningful. God commands it.