

I would like to talk a little about chickens. My family have just acquired seven new chickens to add to the one we had left after the winter had done its worst to our previous small flock of three rather old ladies. The interesting thing about introducing new birds into a chicken run, is how they have to re-establish a pecking order. It matters not whether you add one or seven, each time a whole new pecking order needs to be established and sometimes the process can be disturbing and messy. Often, if one bird is being picked on, others join in. So sometimes new birds need separating from the old ones and very occasionally a new bird will end up being rejected entirely. But eventually, one way or another, things settle down. The old chickens begin being a little more generous to the newcomers and the newcomers begin to feel less self-conscious and defensive. Eventually, they all accept each other and begin laying eggs – a symbol of new life. Having observed all this over the past few weeks, it struck me how alike chicken communities are to human communities. Nations, towns, villages, community groups or clubs can all respond negatively to newcomers and view them with suspicion. But life lived in the full knowledge and hope of resurrection overcomes this.

Creation and resurrection are mirror images of each other, they are held together by the nature and purpose of God. At its simplest, God is life-giver. That has endless implications, all of them glorious. In God there is endless inventiveness that can bring newness out of what

appeared to be finished. In God, there are no dead ends, new doors can open in what seemed to be brick walls.

God works in us most profoundly at moments of crisis – and one way or another, God brings new life out of what appears to be dead. Whether that new life touches us personally, all depends on our response. If we are open to God's prompting, it can transform our lives. If we approach it with a closed heart, then God is simply left transforming the world in spite of us.

Holy Week treated us to a unique insight into the events which show this most deeply: the good news of Jesus' life and death.

Christ does not allow evil to win the day - He does not betray those around him, even when they are denying him, fleeing from him, providing false witness against him or even selling him to his murderers for 30 pieces of silver.

In the end, all alone, Jesus simply has to find a way to strengthen his resolve and move deeper into God. At the moment of crisis Jesus moves further into the Father's goodness, not away from it. So Jesus reaffirms his commitment to his loving Father and even at the point of death he services the mission for which he has been called. To build a people, a society, a Church built on faith and trust.

The story of Christ's death and eventual resurrection shows us that in God there is endless patience and resourcefulness that cannot be

defeated. In fact, that is the central message of Easter. You remember those brick walls - well even the most uncompromising brick wall of all, death, God transforms into a doorway to something miraculous – eternal life. It is Jesus' commitment to his Father, despite the worst the world can throw at him, that secures his eternal life, and opens the door for his followers to do the same.

What is more, Jesus' resurrection brings new hope even for those who have fallen away. We experienced on Good Friday the disciples fleeing. They leave the scene of crucifixion filled with doubt and despair. They are perplexed by a mix of complex emotions – their failure, the death of their leader for which, some of them at least, are partly to blame, but above all they are overtaken by immense fear for their own lives. They lock themselves in an upper room in the hope that a tap will not come at the door from a Roman soldier, or even worse a temple guard. Then the truth of it all is revealed to them and it is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.

In our Gospel reading today we see how the resurrection was just as unbelievable to the disciples as it is to some of us today. They are so caught up in their own self-obsession, fuelled by fear, despair and cynicism, that they cannot see or believe what is in front of their eyes. So much so, that they do not believe the testimony of the women

returning from the empty tomb. Only Peter is curious enough to run to the tomb to investigate further.

If we hold Luke's narrative alongside all the other accounts of Jesus' resurrection we get a more rounded picture of the events as they unfold. Later in Luke's Gospel, we are told of Jesus appearing to some of the disciples on the Damascus road, then he appears to all the disciples in the upper room. Mark's Gospel, retells the same events, but in more brevity. Mark also includes Jesus giving the disciples a commission to build up his church. In John's Gospel, we hear again of him appearing in the upper room to all the eleven and then later by the seashore. Here he gives Peter his commission to 'feed his sheep'. Like the others, Matthew tells of Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene and then to the other disciples in the upper room, and, like Mark, Matthew reveals Jesus telling his disciples that they are to build his church so that more may come to believe and inherit eternal life. Here he gives his famous commission to all followers present and future. He says: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptising them... and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you'.

A few things are notable about these accounts. Notice how Jesus does not accuse them or condemn them because of their denial or betrayal. He simply offers all of them forgiveness and through it renewed hope – he opens a doorway in the brick wall of their despair and guilt. All they

have to do is respond. Even Peter, who denied him three times, is offered the renewed hand of friendship. This is not what Peter expected nor deserved, but instead of punishment, this is the moment Peter begins his new life lived in resurrected hope.

In the disciple's repentance and sorrow, Jesus absolves them from their sin and gives them a new life removed of the shackles of negativity and sin. From this moment forward, eternal life belongs not only to Jesus, but to all those who come to him in repentance and faith and are committed to his charge.

What is that charge? Well as the Gospels outline it, Jesus charges all his followers to build his Church and draw new believers into the resurrected life. This all gives us an insight into faith today. Just like the first disciples we can begin living eternal life now. Eternal life is not some far off event. It happens now. If we can live as though we continue to believe that, then our community will see new life, the eggs of Easter, being revealed throughout the year. We are a community living in resurrection hope, all we have to do is believe that we are!

Amen