

May these words be pleasing.

When I was younger there was a postcard on the wall that said: If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? My Dad was a trombonist and he found another one, vaguely biblical, which read 'Love your neighbour, even when he plays a trombone.'

In our reading from Acts Peter is called to give account of what his new belief. And he doesn't hold back. He's in Jerusalem, speaking to the crowd. I once believed what you still believe, but I've moved on from that. For I know that God has come to me, to us. He came in the man Jesus. And what did you do? You had him killed. You, the crowd, you demanded his death, and he was killed. God knows, however, that you acted in ignorance (Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing). Now, however, now you must stop rejecting and start accepting. Repent so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. Accept the Christ, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

There is guilt that is individual and guilt that is cooperate (or collective). In the news this week: It is surely wrong for an *individual* to be paid for one job as a civil servant *at the same time* as being paid for another job in which they are expected to lobby the government. We are uneasy if our *collective* system of government allows this to happen. (Some of you will remember Ernest Marples who oversaw the Beeching cuts to the railways whilst being a director of a firm building our first motorways). Individual guilt and collective guilt.

Saint Peter's sin was absolute. He completely, absolutely rejected Christ, abandoning his friend Jesus when he most needed support. He broke his promise that he would never leave his friend. He denied Christ three times before the cock crowed. He could not blame anyone else – it was his failure, and his failure alone. After the resurrection, besides the lake, over a fish supper, Jesus talks to Peter, one-to-one. Do you love me? Yes. Three times, do you love me. Yes. Peter given the chance to undo his three denials with three admissions. His individual sin is undone and the love of Christ satisfied.

In the film *The Life of Brian* Graham Chapman (who plays Brian) berates the crowd telling them to think for themselves. He tells them 'you are all individuals' and the crowd (as one) replies 'yes, we're all individuals!' We *are* all individuals, each of us with our own shed loads of guilt, each of us has gone on our own way. We see in all our Easter stories a God whose love is satisfied when we are transformed from being overwhelmed by guilt into be restored into hope.

On Palm Sunday the choir missed out on parading around the church with the big palms. 'We're doing the figure of 8' – which sounds organised but in reality we're simply following the person in front of whilst balancing our books and trying to sing. We join the crowds in Jerusalem: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna! In less than a week the cry becomes 'crucify, kill him, we want Barabbas, we want the murderer, kill Jesus, crucify him'. The crowd is *happy* to accept the responsibility, the guilt, so long as Jesus dies. Peter is quick and bold to remind the crowd that this is what they did, this is what they have done, this is their collective guilt. But you did not know what you were doing, repent, God still loves you, God is still mindful of you. Despite what they have done, despite their collective guilt, God's love is satisfied in their repentance and restoration.

In our Easter stories God offers freedom from individual guilt and collective guilt.

This is Boseley, a labradoodle, who ate 3 easter eggs and a cream egg, in one sitting. Chocolate is not good for dogs. When I was a boy I came back from church one Sunday morning to discover that my Grandma's Labrador had eaten an entire chocolate orange. We knew that he had done something wrong the moment we entered the house because he came with his nose creased up ready for a bop on the nose, from my Grandma, with a piece of newspaper. He knew he had 'done wrong' and expected to be punished.

It would be understandable if we came to our God with a scrunched up nose expecting to be punished. What we find from the God we have hurt is unimaginable grace and a love that is relentless in its outpouring. Our God is a demanding God, he demands that each day we are unburdened, and hopeful, and sharing, sharing that same love with others that he relentlessly offers to us. May times of refreshing come to you from the presence of the Lord.

I would like to share with you, with permission, one final example of transformation as, this week, we reached an important milestone in regaining our freedoms.