

# **Sermon on Sunday 21 April 2024 by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader**

*Readings: Acts 4. 5-12 & John 10. 11-18*



## **So, tell me the Good News**

Have you had a good morning?

When I sat down to think about what to say today, my morning was great. The sun was shining, I had woken up with clear sinuses (amazing), been to a dental hygienist who was gentle and caring, received incredible help from the florist, enjoyed a flat white and a croissant and then there was no queue at the Chemists. It seemed like a morning of minor miracles. I went back home and told our dog what a good boy he was just because he looked lovely snoozing in the sun. My world was all good.

And then it came to me... what if my morning had been different? No warm drink and no money to buy a croissant, freezing weather or floods, or perhaps no rain for months and a failed harvest. No drugs available, no dentistry or GP and the hospitals at Harlow, Stevenage and the Lister had been bombed to smithereens. The dog was gone - no food, no garden fence. How would I feel about God's world?

Maybe your morning has been terrible and you are feeling like rubbish. For certain, a lot of people wake up in the world with no material benefits or education, no health care or no security. Our news brings us reports of drought, famine, populations on the move and, notably, the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. The Geneva Academy has a long list of current Armed Conflicts, often between different army factions and armed militias: 7 in wider Europe, 6 in Latin America, 21 in Asia and 35 in Africa.

Whether we believe politics to be a corrupt and spent force that cannot solve the distribution of resources and personal greed, or we see political solutions as the only lasting solutions; we can agree that we are all complicit as we benefit from the status quo.

Again, whether we believe violence is always wrong or can be unavoidable as a nation when facing and enduring military attack; all of us know the terrible cost of war and the mess it makes for humanity with many repercussions.

**So, how do we respond to a world where events may leave us reeling and with a feeling of powerlessness,**

**even at times where hope may be interpreted by others as, at best, widely optimistic and, at worst, simply naive, even unwise?**

Here are three simple steps to walk forwards and not backwards:

Number 1

Remind ourselves of Jesus saying, 'I am the Good Shepherd'. The Shepherd is primarily a symbol of protection in the widest sense. We face nothing alone. The Risen Christ is always with us; he does not run away when the going gets tough and he never stops caring. His Sheep are his number one concern day and night: he is by their side. Keep the bible passage from John 10 and King David's song and Prayer, Psalm 23, in our hearts.

Number 2

We have Good News. Jesus the Son of God was born to Mary, showed us the love of God and the way to walk with God. Just like a shepherd in Biblical times was prepared to lay down his life to protect the sheep, so Jesus paid the ultimate price by undergoing a slow death on the cross but in three days, he rose from the dead and changed our world for evermore. Death lost its sting, love and life overcame human sin and corruption, suffering and death. This means that our hope is in a world transformed by the love and sacrifice of Jesus; life being complete and everlasting when we walk with Christ.

Wow! As the author of John's Gospel puts it,

**'In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'** (Chapter 1: verses 4-5).

This is a faith and a hope that gives us strength, sustains us whatever and wherever. It changes how we look at life. That is not to say that there will not be challenges and, reassurance will be needed. You may be asking: Where is there resurrection today? If so, I recommend reading/ re-reading Alan's sermon given at the sunrise Easter morning service. It's on the website. Or why not come to Soul Food this evening [details are in the Messenger].

And last, but not least...

Number 3

Start where we can and should – with ourselves. You may know of St Ethelburga. **Ethelburga is 'an inspiration for putting spiritual values into action in challenging times, for bringing faith and action together as one'**. So today I end with St Ethelburga's **Prayer for an End to Violence**.

**God of life,  
Every act of violence in our world,  
between myself and others,  
destroys a part of your creation.  
Stir in my heart a renewed sense of reverence for all  
life.  
Give me the vision to recognise your spirit in every  
human being,**

**however they behave towards me.  
Make possible the impossible  
by cultivating in me the fertile seed of healing love.  
May I play my part in breaking the cycle of violence  
by realising that peace begins with me.  
In the name of Christ, who is our peace, Amen.**

At times we can feel hopeless, as if we are / or might as well be part of the rubbish. We are not. We are placed here as children of God and called to witness to the love and light. Walking with the Risen Christ, and following Peter and all the Saints, we are to share the Good News with everyone.

Thank you to my home group for giving head space and time to face this question.

Thank you to [St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace](#)

### **Footnote**

**'Her life was characterised by courageous action in the face of devastation. Ethelburga was a fearless and selfless leader. When the plague came to her doorstep in Barking, Ethelburga gave her nuns a choice: close the doors and pray or open the doors and serve the community. They chose to serve, even knowing that many of them would die as a result.'**