

Sermon on Easter morning, 20 April 2025

By Rev. Alan Stewart

Breathe

None of us remember our own birth - probably a good thing; that final push, the screams, the first shock of the air, the trauma of sound and light.

And none of us will ever again personally experience that incredible first breath.

When Rosie, our first child, was born, I remember looking into her little eyes still squinting in the new light, and thinking, 'I know you, I recognise you'. This bond is organic and mysterious and I'm not sure any of us quite understand it.

When they were young, I loved to watch both my children sleep. It was one of the most beautiful and bonding things to kneel down beside each of them last thing at night and just listen to their breathing.

In the beginning, so the story goes, into the dust of the earth God breathed. And from that first kiss of life, we're told the first human was formed. It's an incredibly poetic and intimate way of trying to explain our beginning, full of truth about who we are and the bonds that exist between us and our Maker. It reminds us that we are organically connected to the universe. We are this contradictory mix of the gravity of earth and the pull of heaven, the dust of the ground and the breath of God.

And when each one of us entered this world, I believe we were met with more than human eyes. We were also met by the eyes of God, who looked deep into our eyes and said, 'I know you'.

Easter is a story of birth and death and every human experience in between.

Its three days mirror the tapestry of what it is to be human; the sorrowful depths of Good Friday; the joyful heights of Easter Day. And then all that lies between; the Saturdays of our lives.

God himself, in the person of Jesus, travelled through these same three days. So, God can not only say to every one of us, 'I know you,' he can also say, 'I understand'.

Easter is the story of God's empathy.

It is also a story full of contradiction. There's differing eyewitness reports; a different chronology of what happened when. Both understandable, actually - this was obviously not a cover-up.

The greatest contradiction, however, which belongs firmly in the realms of mystery, is that The One who in the beginning breathed that first breath of life, breathes his last on a Roman cross. And then, just when our minds are already stretched too far, the one that was dead breathes again... Resurrection! And ever since, Christians have wrestled with what this might mean, for us, for our world.

Easter is, for Christians, the defining moment in this world's history. Because of it, nothing can ever be the same again. The irreversible has been reversed. Death, that great leveller, can no longer be seen as an end, a full-stop, but as simply a comma. And because of it, a new creative, life-giving power has been let loose in the universe. A power that proves that, in the end, love and goodness win.

On that first evening of that new beginning, Jesus meets with his friends in a locked upstairs room. And they're understandably confused and guilt-ridden and down-right terrified. So, understandably, Jesus is quick to reassure them. 'Peace,' he says.

And then he does what he did in the beginning... he breathes on these broken men and women and says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'; the life-force of God himself.

In this room, on this Easter morning, in which of the days of Easter do we find ourselves? In the broken pieces of Good Friday, the joy of resurrection, or somewhere in between?

I said at the beginning that we will never be able to relive our own birth, our own first breath. But what if we could breathe a new air? Equally life-giving, equally liberating. What if God wants to breathe again into the dust of who we are to bring us to life, to the life we were each made for?

Easter is this new beginning; the beginning of forgetting the God we don't believe in, or half believe in, and meeting the God who believes in us. The beginning of a reconnection, a bonding with those eyes that first looked into ours. The beginning of friendship with the one who knows us and understands us. The

beginning of the rest of our life; of a life worth living, a life infused with that same power which raised Christ from the dead. A power that will lead us through the heights and depths of whatever day we find ourselves in.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!

