

# THIS MONTH: APRIL 2007

## RIDGEWAY METHODIST CHURCH



Dear Friends

### **The meaning of Good Friday**

You have to admit that 'Good Friday' is somewhat oddly named. In Israel, the day is called 'Big Friday', while in Germany, it is called the 'Friday of lamentation'. In much of Eastern Europe and in the Eastern Orthodox Church the day is called 'Great Friday'. The Scandinavians say 'Long Friday'; while in Latin America, they call the day 'Holy Friday'. The English name, 'Good Friday', reminds us that in dying on the cross, Jesus Christ has done the supreme act of good for his people.

If my experience of working with school children is anything to go by, most people here in the south-west of England know what Good Friday commemorates (the children certainly do) – the death of Jesus of Nazareth on the cross, just outside of Jerusalem in about 30 AD. But knowing what the day commemorates is different from knowing what it means.

The Bible begins with life as many people say they would like it to be. The man and woman, partners together, are set in paradise with one another for company and some recreational gardening to enjoy. They are in perfect harmony with one another, with nature and most of all with God. It is only when doubt and disobedience intrude that every relationship is fractured and the spectre of death enters the world.

Most people that I meet want God to be angry about war, famine, child-abuse and the other evils of the world. They ask me, 'why doesn't God do something about it?' The trouble is that we readily want God to be angry about the social evils, which have their roots in doubt and disobedience, but we want him to go easy on the people who commit them, because, we recognise that fallen human nature is a characteristic of every one of us.

The clearest indication of our double standards unfolds with the story of Good Friday. While Christians believe in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, pretty much everyone else agrees that he lived in exemplary life and was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, man who ever lived. Yes, through a web of personal betrayal, self-interest, tainted gossip and political expediency, the peaceful teacher and gentle healer from Galilee is betrayed by his friends and crucified by his enemies.

While we might want to say that we would not have betrayed or crucified Jesus, our daily living often finds afflicted with the very faults and committing the very sins that are so easily identifiable in those who brought Jesus to his death. But the meaning of Good Friday takes us further than that. God acts in both grace and judgment. He acts in grace because he comes in person in Jesus Christ. He acts in judgment because the death of Jesus has a sacrificial

purpose to be a bearer of our sin and shame. The meaning of Good Friday is that though human sin is serious and worthy of death, God in Christ takes it upon himself and deals with it – eternally! In the Old Testament, a worshipper offering a sacrifice had to touch the sacrifice in order to be identified with it (the touch indicating that this one is mine). By faith, Christians identify with Jesus, believing that when he died upon the cross, it was not just an act of supreme heroism but it was a sacrificial and saving act.

### **The meaning of Easter Day**

Easter Day is traditionally the great feast of the resurrection. After his death on the cross, the disciples of Jesus laid him in a tomb but on the following Sunday, the women followers of Jesus, who had been at the cross, and some of the men followers of Jesus (traditionally called his 'disciples') believed that they saw him alive again. Each of the four gospel stories has accounts of the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Lord.

The weaving together of accounts of the empty tomb and appearances of the risen Lord is important. The only conclusion to be drawn from the empty tomb is that someone had removed the body. Indeed, this is rather the conclusion that Mary Magdalene draws when she finds the body has disappeared ('they have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him', John 20:13). On the other hand, the appearances of the risen Lord could simply have been construed as apparitions. Indeed, this is how the disciples. Indeed, this was the first reaction of some of the disciples ('they were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost', Luke 24:37). It was only after talking with Jesus, walking with him, touching him, eating with him, that his followers came to believe that he was really risen and alive.

From the time that doubt and disobedience had entered into the world, death had been the ultimate consequence. The life of Jesus was a life of implicit faith and obedience in God and though he died as a sin-bearer, God raised him up again. The great Puritan writer, John Owen, called Easter Day, 'the day death died'. That is why it is such a great celebration for Christians – for by his cross and resurrection, Jesus has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. The great claim of the Christian faith is that the risen Christ can be known in our hearts and life today.

Happy Easter!

*John Haley*

### **Bad news: Two pence in the pound off your income tax!**

This sounds like good news to most people but if you pay income tax please remember that it can be bad news for the church. We encourage everyone who pays income tax to give by gift-aid, a simple and quite painless way of enabling the church to recover your income tax on any gift you make. Under the present rate of tax every £1 you give to the church by gift-aid becomes £1.28. Under the new rate of tax every £1 you give to the church by gift-aid will become £1.25. This does not sound much but added together it can make a difference to the total amount of income tax we can recover from all who give in this way. Please bear this in mind and I encourage you to think carefully about your giving, remembering that we really want our work to go ahead and, if you pay income tax but do not yet gift-aid your donations, please speak to one of the church officers without delay. It is a simple and variable way of managing your giving. (John Haley)

## **General Church Meeting (22 April, 2.00 pm)**

The purpose of the general church meeting is to appoint stewards and representatives to the church council and to receive various reports. This year, we have a special guest, Revd Dave Martin (Plymouth and Exeter Methodist District Evangelism Enabler) coming to speak to us. Please make a special effort to attend. Those who would like to stay for lunch between the morning service and the meeting should speak to one of the stewards. (John Haley)

## **The Noise Weekend**

The NOISE weekend this year takes place from 5-7 May. There will be the usual mix of young people serving in the local community with free car washing, litter picking etc. as well as a Saturday evening event with curry flavour and a community event on the Monday. On Saturday 28 April the young people will be handing out balloons and chocolates in the Ridgeway as a taster of what's going to be happening the following weekend.

## **Flower festival**

On Saturday 12 May there will be a flower festival in the church, 10.00 am—4.00 pm. Sue Couch is contacting church groups—please can you let her know if you would like to do your own arrangement based on a Bible story, or if you would prefer the flower group to do the arrangement for you. The flower festival is planned to coincide with the Plympton May Fair. Oasis will be open all day. Offers of help for stewarding, for Oasis or for helping with arrangements to Miriam, Sue Couch or any member of the Outreach group.

## **April Diary**

### **Sunday 1:**

**10.30 am**      **Revd John Haley**

**7.00 pm**      **Mrs Julie Birkett**

### **Maundy Thursday:**

2.45 pm      Women's Fellowship: John Haley with an Easter Message

7.30 pm      Maundy Thursday Communion

### **Good Friday:**

**10.00 am**      **Good Friday Service**

**1.30 pm**      **Good Friday Treasure Hunt**

### **Saturday 7:**

8.30 am      Monthly Prayer Meeting

10.00-12.00      Oasis Coffee Bar: Mission Outreach (Christine Gregory)

### **Easter Day:**

**9.30 am**      **Breakfast**

**10.30am**      **Revd John Haley**

**7.00 pm**      **Revd Nathan Fisher/Revd John Haley**

### **Saturday 14:**

10.00 - 12.00      Oasis Coffee Bar: Church Outreach (Pat Stead)

### **Sunday 15:**

**10.30 am**      **Mr Chris Sturley**

**7.00 pm**      **Mrs Janet Dobinson**

### **Tuesday 17:**

10.00-12.00      Patchwork Group

2.15 pm      Service at Pocklington Rise (all welcome)

Tuesday 17 (contd.)  
 7.30 pm Ministry and Mission Committee  
 7.45 pm Ladies' Group

Wednesday 18:  
 10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches

Thursday 19:  
 2.45 pm Women's Fellowship

Saturday 21:  
 10.00-12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar: Church Funds: Avril Baker

**Sunday 22:**  
 10.30 am **Revd David Martin**  
 2.00 pm **General Church Meeting**  
 7.00 pm **Revd John Haley**

Monday 23:  
 7.30 pm Moore Bible Study: New Testament (1)

Tuesday 24:  
 10.00-12.00 Patchwork Group  
 7.45 pm Ladies' Group: Revd John Haley "Easter message"  
 7.30 pm Men's Fellowship Elburton

Wednesday 25:  
 10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches

Thursday 26:  
 2.45 pm Women's Fellowship

Saturday 28:  
 10.00-12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar: Youth Outreach (Miriam, Kim, Steve)

**Sunday 29:**  
 10.30 am **Revd John Haley**  
 7.30 pm **Revd John Haley**

Monday 30:  
 7.30 pm Moore Bible Study: New Testament (2)

**Church office hours:**  
**Tuesday-Friday 9.30 am - 12.30 pm**

**Church telephones:**  
**348178 (office only)**  
**331186 (pre-school and hall)**

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Information for May 's *This Month* to the office by 24 April please.