

St. Ninian's Parish Church
Sunday 15th April 2018
1 John 3: 1 - 7; Luke 24: 36 - 48

This week my 5-year old son spontaneously offered me one of his chocolate bunnies, which he was given at Easter, and that he has been munching his way through over the past two weeks. It was only a small chocolate Easter bunny, but nevertheless I was quite taken aback by this somewhat uncommon, random, and spontaneous act of generosity.

I said 'Thank you, that's very kind of you.' 'Ah,' he said in reply, 'some days I'm kind, and some days I'm naughty. Today, I'm kind.' He followed-up this very accurate observation by saying, 'sometimes my brain makes me do naughty things.'

Random days of kindness and naughtiness are not just part of the household that I live in, they are found the world over. In this world there are days when we experience kindness, generosity, goodness, love. The writer of our reading from First John this morning used the word righteousness to describe those experiences. He said, 'My children, do not be misled; it is the person who does right who is righteous, as God is righteous.' In this world there are days of righteousness, and these are days when the light shines.

But, in this world there are also days of naughtiness, days when we experience wrongdoing, evil. Both the writer of that reading from First John, and Jesus in our Gospel reading this morning used the word sin in relation to wrongdoing and lawlessness. In this world there are days of sin, and these are the days of darkness.

In our world it is all too easy to come across these dark days. We often hear about the days of naughtiness in this world, the days of sin, of lawlessness. A newspaper, a television, or a website are always very quick to tell us about them. This week it was, amongst other things, a chemical attack on civilians in Syria; knife crime in London; a man-of-the-cloth abusing children in Scotland. These are just three examples of the stories that have darkened our days this week with feelings of not just naughtiness, but of wrongdoing, of evil, of sin.

Indeed, you don't have to go as far as a media outlet to hear the stories people tell of the naughty things others get up to: the gossip we share with friends too often touches on it, as do the thoughts we share with ourselves, in our heads, about others. There are times too, although we are not inclined to admit it, when we ourselves are implicated in making dark weather for others on some days.

But, what about days of kindness, of goodness, of love, of generosity: days of righteousness, where do we go to hear about these? How often does the news of these things brighten-up our days helping us to feel that we live lives in this world in which the light is dawning? How often are we actively implicated in creating days of goodness in the lives of others?

When the first followers of Jesus experienced a dramatic example of how days of kindness and love, and days of wrongdoing and evil can occur sometimes side-by-side, they were filled with stunned confusion. We read this morning about these disciples, gathered together, trying to come to terms with the fact that their friend Jesus, who to them was the very personification of love, had been killed on a cross and his body entombed in a cave. To them it appeared that evil, in the form of selfish, self-interest, had triumphed over self-sacrificing love and goodness. These were dark days of evil, and to them, back then, the world was only filled with darkness, and there was no light.

But, then, there in front of them, just a few days after they had witnessed darkness fall, the person who for them embodied a world of love, whom they had seen crucified, Jesus, stood before them, seemingly alive once again. A day of death had been followed by a day of life; a day of evil by a day of love; a day of crucifixion had been followed by a day of vindication. Such a seemingly uncommon, random, and spontaneous act of generosity left them stunned, as the Gospel writer Luke wrote in the passage we read, 'They were still unconvinced, still wondering, for it seemed to good to be true.'¹

When they finally overcame their disbelief, Jesus said to them, 'You are witnesses to all this,' begin from Jerusalem and proclaim it to everyone. Go and tell the world about the God who brings days of love and light, of goodness and kindness, of life and righteousness out of dark days of naughtiness, of wrongdoing, of evil, of sin. You are witnesses, he said to them, that belief in me and in my life brings light to dark days, shows people a way out of their wrongdoing, makes this world a world of love rather than a world of sin.

We who are gathered here this morning are also witnesses, and we too have a message to proclaim. In baptising Freya, a baby who is to her parents the very personification of light breaking through the darkness, we know that in this world in which she is to grow up and live, and also in her own person, there will be days of kindness, and days of naughtiness; there will be dark days, and there will be days of light; there will be days of love, and days of evil; there will be in the years to come in her life days when she herself loves, and days when she does wrong, sins.

We know this, because we give thanks this morning for her birth as a human being, a person just like us, and that is what people are like; they are light and darkness together. But, what we proclaim, what we are witnesses to is the faith that believing in the God who was here in the person of Jesus Christ, and by following in his way, the days of light, of kindness, of love can triumph over the days of darkness, the days of evil, the days of sin and be for us and for Freya a guiding light so that she will grow up to know that like all people she has a life in this world that is valued by God and by others, and that she has a life in this world that is valuable to others and valuable to God.

¹ Luke 24: 41

In baptism we proclaim the resurrection, which we celebrate during these days and weeks of Eastertide, the season of Easter. In baptism we are witnesses to the truth that although human beings are born in to a world that endures too many dark days, and that these dark days are too often filled with a darkness we ourselves create, nevertheless the good news is that it doesn't have to be this way.

In celebrating new birth, we are witness to the power of new life that gives us the opportunity to reshape this world so that our belief in the light of love, of peace, of merciful justice, of generosity and goodness is never overcome or defeated by the darkness of evil in this world, or the capacity for us to sin.

So, go and tell people about the love you have witnessed today; the love that God has for people, people just like Freya, and the love that we have the capacity to share with others. Go and tell others of the baptism that proclaims our belief that new life in Jesus Christ brings new hope to a world too often consumed by hopelessness.