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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : April 21st, 2019
“Easter Sunday”

EASTER DAY 2019

Not long ago a well-known paper printed the following delightful correction, which made the expense of buying a daily paper well worthwhile. Their clarification read as follows: “We misquoted the Headmistress, Marian Gibbs on March 9. She did not use the phrase “hug-a-mugger” (*i.e. embrace a mugger*) when discussing politicians sending their children to elite state schools. What she said was that they would not be “hugger-mugger” (*i.e. cheek by jowl*) with people from all backgrounds. We apologise for the confusion”.

It is all too easy for people to be misquoted and for a simple, straightforward message to be misreported or misconstrued. When I went to work at Britain’s first Ecumenical City Centre Church in Milton Keynes, the Bishop of Oxford sent me a letter of welcome in which he meant to say ‘with the opening of the new church it is all most exciting’. Unfortunately his secretary typed the phrase as ‘it is almost exciting’. Then there was the famous wartime message which began “Send reinforcements - we're going to advance”, which ended up as “Send three and fourpence, we're going to a dance”.

No such misunderstanding is possible about Holy Week and Easter. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, enters Jerusalem and is acclaimed by the people as their King. After throwing the moneychangers out of the Temple, he spends time teaching people two rules: “Love and worship God; love and care for your neighbours”. Aware that the authorities are plotting to get rid of him, Jesus gathers his disciples for a final meal together where he washes their feet. He is then betrayed by one of his disciples, arrested and tried and condemned to death – partly because many of the same people who had cheered him as their King were turned by the authorities to jeer for his execution. So he was killed, and his body hurriedly buried in a borrowed cave before the Sabbath came into force. And then – “early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark.....” It was a simple and clear message that God gave to the world: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that

we should have life". There really can be no misunderstanding about the true message of Easter.

Yet of course it goes without saying that it's a hard story for human beings to take in. Down the ages, men and women have constantly speculated on what might really have happened to the body. People will always discuss every possibility – and many simply refuse to believe that Jesus rose from the dead and was alive again. But that is what Christians do strive to believe – incredible though it may seem. God gave his message to the world in a very clear and simple way – there really was no room for misunderstanding. Any confusion is usually down to human beings who will always doubt the validity when something is experienced which cannot easily be explained. And of course we know it isn't easy for us to convince others of the truth of the Easter story. That is something that each human being has to think about and decide for him or herself. All that each of us can do is to be open to the possibility of God, remembering that for many the "possibility" can grow into "certainty", "doubt" can change to "belief". For many, their faith in God is deepened and strengthened by the remarkable events of that first Easter – and there is no reason why that might not happen for you this Easter.

Easter is almost too big for words, especially in a message that can easily be misunderstood. But poetry can help us. To finish, here is a poem by W H Vanstone, a wonderful writer and parish priest, who died a few years ago. It's called Joseph of Arimathea's Easter:

**'He's gone,' says Joseph, and, with
Pilate's leave**

**Eases the nails and lowers him from
the Tree,**

**Wraps him in reverent and tender
thoughts**

**And lays him in the cave called
Memory.**

**That cave is deeply hewn in Joseph's
heart:**

**All that's within will always be his
own:**

**In memory's cave the treasure of his
past**

**Is safe for ever, walled and sealed by
stone.**

**'He's safe,' says Joseph, 'safe in this
cool place**

**And no one now can take my Lord
away.**

**In years to come I'll still see his dear
face**

As clearly as I've seen it on this day.'

'He's gone!' cries Joseph at the empty tomb:

But Mary says, 'He's left a word for you:

He cannot rest content to be your past; so he has risen to be your future too.'