

Matthew's weekly musing
4th March 2021
Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Here's the beginning of my children's talk for Easter Day. I'll ask, "What are these?"



And why are they special? And why are they yummy, especially if there is cinnamon flavouring? "

Here's the other part of the beginning. "What does the empty egg signify (a great word for a 5 year old!) and why the chocolate?"



The egg represents the empty tomb, and the chocolate is something special. The cross on the bun reminds us Jesus loves us, and the tasty bun is a treat.

The children will hold out empty hands to receive and enjoy and then they'll rush off to the back of church to the toys and books and games.

Which is a bit like us at Easter. We remember, and receive and then rush off for a feast and a busy week and all too easily the soul-gripping moments of Easter fade into the background.

There's a sense in which Easter becomes all about us, rather than all about Jesus the Christ. We touch the edge of forgiveness, we sing stirring hymns, we are moved by the green hill, we wonder at the empty tomb, we light a candle saying, "Jesus is the Light of the World", and for a moment all is well between us and God. For a moment there is a rising desire to do something *for* the one who died for us. Then we set off into family gatherings, and talk about holidays, and think about work and the income we wish was even greater. And we are lost in our own little world.

Perhaps you are thinking, "Oh dear, Matthew is in a really glum place; look how he is writing! Where is the joy and hope of Easter?"

Well I'm with you! So what was going on that I should so suddenly flip from fun with children into a critique of adults?

I think it is something to do with the reading that has really had me musing this week.

I was hugely struck by Jesus' response to the anonymous woman who crashes a dinner party and anoints him with expensive, wonderful, fragrant flow of luscious ointment. She has to break the alabaster flask to release the gift.

Here's the narrative in full:

Mark 14

- 3 While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.
- 4 But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.
- 6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Did you see Jesus' response?

"She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial."

Anointing was a powerful symbol for the Jew of Jesus's day. When raising up a prophet or king, the priest would anoint his head with oil. So the woman was honouring Jesus's unique importance.

Before burial a body was anointed with sweet smelling nard, perhaps so that the lingering aroma of perfume would signify the lingering memories of the dead person.

I've learnt two things, or rather I am taking on board two things. First, the woman had no right to anoint a king, but she had every right to acknowledge and honour the king. As have I.

Secondly she was honouring the significance of the death of man whose head she was covering with gentle refreshing nard. A head that all too soon was to be grimly wounded with a crown of thorns. A living flask that was to be broken on the cross to release love in a new and beautiful way.

I find I am redoubled in my desire to share in the woman's gesture. I anoint Jesus whenever I reach out to a neighbour, whenever I give of who I am and whenever I share what I have with those who are seeking, hurting, needing. I am clear that my Easter Celebrations are not just a nod in the right direction, but an energising, continual commitment to the One who so loved the world. There may be a cost, as for the broken phial, but the cost releases the fragrance of the Christian Way.