

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

Easter Sunday 2021

The Thought for the Week.

Something that gave me a great thrill several years ago was when I was Minister in Girvan North Church, and I was invited on one occasion to accompany our Boys Brigade to their Annual Camp down in North Wales. There we were, in a farmer's field, under canvas, right on the coast at the very pleasant seaside resort of Barmouth, enjoying a week of wall to wall sunshine! As well as taking morning and evening prayers and going off on an excursion by rail to Harlech, we had great fun, and even I was persuaded to take part in some of the sports! The less said about that, the better!

I remember the night I was asked to tell the Officers and Boys a Ghost Story – it was one of my favourites, “The Man with the Golden Arm” whose conclusion frightens the living daylights out of all the listeners! I'll maybe tell you it some time.

We all like a good ghost story.

“From ghoulies and ghosties and long legged beasties and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us!”

So says the old Scottish Prayer and so perhaps say a good many of us, for we can easily feel very uncomfortable and frightened by the talk of spirits and ghosts and other strange things that we don't quite understand.

I can remember watching Daniel Radcliffe in the Ghost Tale, “The Woman in Black”, and that is certainly a film that can send you diving for shelter behind the sofa!

And when you read each of the Gospel accounts of Easter morning, the disciples of Jesus were no different from us.

When they saw Jesus appear among them, standing before them, very much alive, and they had seen Him die only days before, they were terrified.

It must have been very confusing.

The Bible tells us that, on the evening of that first Easter, as the disciples were listening to the two men who had met the stranger on the road to Emmaus and then discovered that it was Jesus, the two men had hurried all the way back to Jerusalem.

And as they were listening, Jesus Himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Peace was the last thing that they felt.

They were terrified and filled with fear, quite convinced that they were seeing a ghost!

And Jesus spoke to them and said to them, “Why are you frightened? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it is really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do.”

And then, later, on the shore of Lake Galilee, when they had returned to their jobs as fishermen, they saw the figure on the beach, and they came ashore, and He asked them “Have you anything to eat?”

And they gave Him a piece of fish and He ate it as they watched.

That was even further proof that they were not seeing a ghost. A ghost doesn't need food.

I like the story of the skeleton who walked into a bar and said to the barmaid, "A pint of beer and a mop, please"!

The disciples had seen Jesus die.

They had seen Him placed in a tomb.

But now, they saw Jesus alive – they could see the scars in His hands and feet; they watched Him eat food.

They were not seeing a ghost

Now, you and I were not there that night.

We didn't get to touch Jesus or see the nail marks or watch Him eat fish.

In fact we have never seen Him with our own eyes at all.

But we still have all the proof we need, if proof we need, if evidence is required.

Not only do we have the Bible – the Old Testament which points ahead to Jesus, but we also have the New Testament which records all these events for us. That is proof.

And we have the existence of the Church today, which began with a few folks in a faraway place and is now spread through all the world, millions of men and women, boys and girls who follow Jesus. That is proof.

And we see people whose lives are lived out in service and love to others, all in the Name of Jesus. In those early days, it was dangerous to be a follower of Jesus. Peter and James and John and Paul and many others were executed because they followed Jesus – and in many countries today, thousands of people are imprisoned and persecuted because they are believers. That is proof.

Many years ago, one of the world's greatest violinists, Fritz Kreisler who was born in Vienna, was setting out from Hamburg in Germany to give a concert in London. He had a little time before his boat sailed and so he wandered into a music shop to browse. The owner asked if he could take a look at the violin that Kreisler was carrying.

The owner then quickly left the shop and returned with two policemen who told the violinist that he was under arrest.

When Kreisler asked why, they said that it was because he had Fritz Kreisler's violin.

"But I am Fritz Kreisler", he answered.

Long before the days of a photo ID, they did not believe him and asked him to come along with them to the police station.

With his boat soon leaving, there was no time, and so Kreisler asked for his violin.

He proceeded to play "Liebesfreud", a piece that he was well known for, to prove his identity.

It worked – the police had the proof they needed. Kreisler was not arrested and set sail for England.

Fritz Kreisler needed only to play his violin to prove that he was the true owner of the instrument.

Jesus has nothing more to do to prove that He is indeed Lord and Saviour.

Jesus was either a deluded megalomaniac who has deluded the world for 2000 years, or He was God in human flesh.

His life, His death and His Resurrection are the proof of Easter.

That proof is contained in the pages of the Bible which is powerful enough to bring millions of people to faith and to keep us in that faith.

That proof is in the existence of His Church in all its various branches throughout the world, preaching His Name to all the nations, and seeking to bring His love, His peace, His joy, His forgiveness, His compassion to bear on all of life.

His Church includes the dear folk here at St Nicholas who try to walk with Him and do His will and do all that they can to bring His Kingdom to bear in our town – ordinary folk who can say, often through tears and troubles and disappointments, “The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!”

Happy Easter!

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister