

Notes on Matthew 28 verses 1 – 10 ‘Easter – the great surprise!!’

When I was in school speaking about Easter, I discovered a brilliant new Easter game called Easter egg fighting!! This is a popular game played at Easter by children in Latvia where you hard boil chicken eggs and then it's time to fight by tapping your opponent's egg with your own. You take turns tapping eggs until one of the shells cracks and the winner is the one whose eggshell did not crack. However, we won't be using eggs, instead we'll be using chocolate eggs as there is not only far more potential for chaos, but they taste a lot nicer too!!

The first great surprise of Easter is the celebration of the defeat of sin by Jesus' death and resurrection. At Easter we celebrate that Jesus has triumphed as the Lamb of God, the Servant of God and the Gift of God over the power of sin. Each of these titles gives a slightly different meaning to what this triumph means. Firstly, they remind us that we are no longer separated from God, secondly, that we are no longer enslaved by sin and thirdly that we are no longer defiled by sin because Jesus has made us all clean. This is why we use soooooo much water when we baptise because we want to celebrate how utterly and completely Jesus has cleansed us from our sin. Our pool celebrates that we are washed clean by Jesus and when we trust in Jesus the pool reminds us again and again that we ARE made clean. There are no maybes, no ifs, no buts, the pool unashamedly declares us to be CLEAN.

The second great surprise of Easter is the celebration of the defeat of death by Jesus' death & resurrection. The angel rolls the stone away to let the women, and us, in to see that Jesus' body is no longer there and that he has been raised from the dead. The angel tells the women, and us, that what we see is truly true, Jesus is alive because he has conquered the power of death. Finally, the angel says that death has been defeated, its power to rob us of life is gone for ever because Jesus is alive and he gives us life which death can never take from us. Our pool celebrates the triumph of life, for yes though James and Molly will go under the water to speak of their sharing in the death of Jesus, they will not stay under the water, which is a relief. Instead, they will rise out of the water celebrating that death has lost its hold over them. This is why Joshua is helping me to baptise James as I'm fairly sure he would stay under the water if I baptised him by myself and thus ruin the point I'm making. By the way, another version of the name 'Joshua' is 'Jesus' and so it's very appropriate that Jesus is in the pool with me because we all want to celebrate the wonderful truth that James and Molly, are really and truly and fully ALIVE in Jesus!!

The third great surprise of Easter is the celebration of the defeat of the devil by Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is the sign that we can live no longer under the tyranny of the devil and its minions but in the life of love lavished on us by Jesus. We know this because the Holy Spirit, the gift of God, dwells in us and that our lives are now filled by his love from our heads to our toes; they are filled with joy unspeakable; they are filled with his peace which is beyond all understanding; they are shaped and inspired by the cardinal virtues of faith, hope and love and they are shaped by the purposes and plans of God defined by loving both God and our neighbour. Our pool celebrates this new life Molly and James are to walk in by the simple difference that they both went into the pool dry and then they came out very wet. By this simple act of obedience, they have vowed that from now on they will live a life of trusting and obeying Jesus as they live the alternative lifestyle the pool describes

On the 18th June 1815 the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon and the French army at the battle of Waterloo. To celebrate his victory signals were sent back to England to share the good news with the whole nation. One of the signal stations was on Winchester Cathedral and it was late in the day when the signal was sent out, but all that was passed on was the message 'Wellington defeated' because a sudden cloud made it impossible to read the whole of the message. The countryside was overwhelmingly grieved by the tragic news but then the sky cleared allowing the whole of the message to be sent, 'Wellington defeated... the enemy'. I have given out lots of eggs this year because I want as many people as possible to know the incredible and surprising message of Easter 'Jesus defeated...the enemy'. May we all know and rejoice in the Good News of the angel's message in our lives today.