

Easter is a time of spring, of hope and of new birth. And it is this sense of new beginnings that has associated chicks, eggs, lambs and daffodils with Easter. The egg symbolizing the tomb that could not hold Jesus.

For many years my mum had a Lindt chocolate rabbit – the Lindt rabbits are so famous they even had a high court battle with a rival chocolate maker in Germany over who had the rights to make chocolate rabbits. Lindt lost their battle. But the rabbit in my mum's kitchen sat on a shelf for years – it even got a bit dusty – I threatened to eat it on several occasions until I decided it had sat there a bit too long even for me!

It sat there because she didn't have the heart to eat it because it was a rabbit!

But I can't be too critical of her. A few years ago Mike Fletcher brought me back from Bruges a chocolate bishop. St Nicholas I believe. It stood on a shelf in our living room for years, because neither Ted nor I felt it respectful (or maybe had the stomach) to eat a bishop, or maybe we weren't sure of what was inside!

I have a thing about penguins, and there are all sorts of penguin items around our house. I was even given chocolate penguins last year. And yes, you've guessed it. I haven't had the heart to eat them either. Though other chocolates never last long. (apart from the Brussel sprouts!)

But chocolate rabbits, chocolate bishops and chocolate penguins are not meant as decorations. They are actually meant to be eaten.

And how to eat a rabbit, a penguin or a bishop, well, you just have to get on with it!! You need to crack them open and then enjoy.

And that's what God did on the first Easter morning with the tomb which held the body of Jesus. He cracked it open and, as we heard, when the women arrived with their spices to embalm Jesus' body, the stone had been rolled away and Jesus had been raised.

And although they ran back to Jerusalem with “terror and amazement” to tell the other disciples, those emotions soon turned to joy as Jesus appeared to them in the Upper Room that first Easter evening.

Jesus rose on Easter morning proclaiming the victory of love – he cracked open the tomb to bring us new life and hope, to ensure us of his risen presence with us always to give us strength and courage and joy.

An old clergyman was once tackled by a young man whom life had treated badly. The young man had taken the blame for a mistake that his boss had made, but instead of ensuring his future it had ruined his life and he had to leave the country and take up a post elsewhere in a remote part of Canada.

Recounting to the old clergyman how hard and harsh life had been to him, how full of disappointment and disillusionment he was, he looked at the old man’s dog collar and said, “But what would you know. No doubt you’ve had it cushy praying and preaching and reading the Bible all day.

What would you know of real life with all its ups and downs, cushioned and cossetted as you are by your religion.

Gently the old clergyman told the embittered young man of a life of stress, full of hardship, full of difficulty and disappointment. But he said, when he was at his lowest, he always seemed to see a light in the distance beckoning him on. A light that gave him hope in despair, indicating that there was a future to work for, something better to live for, that however black the present there was light at the end of the tunnel. There was, and would always be, hope

And that sums up the message of Easter so well. It gives us hope. And there are many things we can live without but I believe it is difficult to live a full life without hope.

Looking at our east window you can see the story unfold. At the bottom of the window there are guards or the soldiers asleep.

As it says in the Gospel of Matthew (27:65,66). Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

Then depicted in the centre of the window it was at dawn that the women went to the tomb. Both Matthew and John tell us that Jesus appeared to them in the garden as the sun rose that first Easter morning. In the light of the dawn they saw that the tomb was cracked open and empty, "suddenly Jesus met them" and his greeting to them, and to us, is 'Don't be afraid.'

The Easter Gospel of a new light flooding the empty tomb and new hope flooding the hearts and lives of Jesus' followers.

One of the features of the appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection was the way he appeared to his disciples when they most needed him:-

In the Upper Room that first Easter evening as they gathered in bewilderment and confusion:

To Thomas who had missed him the first two times and was full of doubts and questioning:

At the lakeside as the disciples toiled without success, fed up and disheartened, trying to catch fish:

And after breakfast to speak 3 words of forgiveness and reassurance to Peter who had denied him 3 times.

The tomb was not intact, it had been broken open by God, Jesus was, and is alive, and because of that a new light shone, and broken lives were renewed in hope.

So let's not keep our Easter eggs, in whatever form they might be - rabbits, bishops or penguins - let's not keep them as decorations, but breaking them open, remind ourselves of the empty tomb, and be filled, not only with chocolate, but also with faith and joy.

