

FAKE NEWS & EASTER

18 months ago not many people used the term “Fake News”, but now it’s a phrase that is constantly being used – whether it’s Donald Trump tweeting to deny allegations about Russian interference in his presidential campaign or refuting accusations about his personal life or President Putin denying his country had anything to do with the poisoning of the Skripals in Salisbury or complicity with President Assad’s use of chemical weapons in Syria.

There was the fake news that Ken Dodd had died before he had and recently the news did the rounds that Peter Kay had died but hadn’t. It is very easy with social media to spread fake news.

But if you want to rubbish an allegation or accusation you just have to say its “fake news”, a phrase that even made it into this year’s Passion Play in the village as the chief Priests said that what Jesus was preaching about God’s love and forgiveness was “fake news”!

And many today, and not just outside the church, would, and have said the same about Jesus’ resurrection.

And, indeed, as we heard in our Gospel today, even the disciples couldn’t believe their eyes, thinking that they were seeing a ghost as the risen Jesus stood in their midst in the Upper Room.

It was still the day of resurrection, and they were still dejected and defeated. Though Jesus had spoken to them about his resurrection, their minds hadn’t received the message; it hadn’t registered and as they met in the aftermath of Good Friday they were frightened and afraid, and they thought their eyes were deceiving them as Jesus appeared to them.

Their doubts and fears must have been palpable for Jesus said, “Why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your hearts. Look at my hands and my feet... touch me and see for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

The resurrection was no fake news. It was true. Jesus was alive. And to prove the point they watched as he ate some broiled fish in front of them.

No fake news. The proof was undisputable. They heard him with their own ears, they saw him with their own eyes, they touched the wounds with their own hands.

No fake news for that experience was repeated on a number of occasions before the Ascension. The resurrection was, and is, no fake news.

As the writer of the book, “A Thoughtful Guide to Faith” put it, “The Resurrection isn’t simply another of the interesting events of the New Testament. It is the **foundation** of the New Testament. The Resurrection is the bottom line for Christianity.

It's what everything else rests on", and he went on to say "The Resurrection is what gave birth to the Church, to the Gospels, indeed to everything that makes up Christianity. But more important than that", he concludes, "It's what keeps it all going today."

Michael Ramsey, the 100th Archbishop of Canterbury said that the most convincing evidence that the Resurrection actually happened is that the Church still exists 2000 years later. It's unlikely that would have happened if the Resurrection was fake news. The Church may have survived as some small esoteric strange middle-eastern sect, but not as a world-wide phenomenon with a membership of one third of the world's population.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all end, not with explanations of what happened that first Easter morning, but with Jesus' command to proclaim the Gospel to all nations.

The young church was not left to live forever in the Upper Room, but was told to go into all the world with the Good News of Jesus who though crucified, dead and buried, was raised and is alive for evermore.

It has been said and preached many times that the most perfect image of God is Jesus hanging on the cross, and the cross has become the universal badge of Christianity.

But have we got it right?

Surely the most perfect image we have of God is the empty tomb – that the historical Jesus is the contemporary Jesus, that like for those first disciples we read about this morning, the risen Jesus comes alongside us in all our doubts and fears, in all the raggedness and uncertainty of life and says "Peace be with you". Now go and share the Gospel, now go and be the Gospel, now go and live the Gospel in whatever way you can today.

The endings of the Gospels seem to stop quite suddenly. There's no neat conclusion or summing up, because the Gospels are not the end of the story – the story continues on in you and me and in all who make up the world-wide church today. We continue to write the Gospels with our own lives – not only by our words but more importantly by our actions.

The American philosopher and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who coined the phrase that your health is your wealth also said, "What you **are** shouts so loudly in my ears that I cannot hear what you say."

One of the saddest stories I have heard was about a woman who had been a staunch member of her local church. She had helped initiate services of prayer and the laying-of-hands for those who were in need. She was a constant source of encouragement to her minister. And then things fell apart in her life. Her husband died suddenly and she became ill and depressed.

But no one from her local church seemed to notice so nobody called to see how she was or why she had stopped going to church. When she finally recovered she never went back to church and indeed lost her faith. No doubt the minister preached

about love. No doubt the congregation sang about love and passages about love were read from the Bible, but none of that congregation actually lived out love.

They lived, as it were, in the huddle of the upper room, behind closed doors. They were full of joy as they experienced Jesus' presence among them, but were deaf to his voice to go out into the world, not just to proclaim but to live out the Gospel.

It is when we show God's love and care by our actions that we disprove the accusations that Christianity is fake news. The proof is not in the arguments that we present but in the lives that we live.

Today's epistle is instructive and significant in that it records that not only did the disciples leave the Upper Room in obedience to Jesus to preach the Good News but they went on to put it into practice by ministering to the crippled beggar.

Christians have been described as Easter People because the story of Easter is the foundation of our faith and the foundation of the church, not fake news but a true story that continues to be told, for better or for worse, by us and the lives we live today.

As I put in this month's magazine 'The mark of a great church is not how many people come, but how many people live differently for having been there'.