

## EASTER 6

Last week an English vine from Notcutts, destined to bear fruit in the tiny Rectory garden. Wish me luck! This week, I want to share a memory of a challenge I gave a few years ago to a well-known Suffolk artist, Maggi Hambling...

Every Good Friday she paints a picture of the crucifixion or at least, her interpretation of that event on Golgotha. I asked her if she had done one on the Resurrection and after her lukewarm, negative response, I teased her quite firmly to do one! And here it is...I had to pay for it before she handed it over, but it is unmistakably Hambling's style: the empty black tomb below and the shimmering white, Christ-figure above. These are strong vibrant colours...as if to suggest that Easter and Pentecost are inseparably linked – which they are, of course.

And then the overarching sky, or is it the turquoise, translucent image of water, the same water in which Jesus was baptised, or the Sea of Galilee on which he famously walked? Whatever your view, Maggi has captured that theological symmetry of Christ Risen, Ascended and Glorified.

This picture takes pride of place in my study above the computer screen, so if you have a zoom meeting with me, you cannot see it. It is, if you like, a 'hidden Easter' - yet constantly viewed by me and privately, constantly present. It is that resonance again of all those 'I AM' moments in John's Gospel and here: 'I AM the Resurrection and the Life', words I never seem to tire of hearing or, proclaiming. What was hidden is now so public, so 'out there'...

You won't be surprised to hear that I was a devotee of Sr. Wendy Beckett on all things art, sacred and prayerful. I only wish I could have showed her and shared with her my special Resurrection oil painting. She would have loved it and spoken so articulately to the camera, and all the people she drew in to her wise, enthusiastic, unashamedly religious commentary of a deeply spiritual, artistic 'creation' and form.

And it is something I have been mentioning a lot in recent sermons – how God showers us with gifts which we can use and must use; how his choosing us and calling us to follow Him is something we cannot finally ignore or resist. Think of those unforgettable, compelling words through which the Risen Christ speaks to us still:

“You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.”

The Easter story is all about this vocational promise of serving the One who loved us first, loved us from our very beginning, loved us before we even knew he was there for us. The Easter story is all about bearing fruit, fruit that will endure, thrive, and beautify: all that is dark, selfish, ungracious or, unkind.

Is it no wonder that we need the inspiration of the Arts and Music? Is it no wonder that we need to grow things in our gardens for our mental health and wellbeing? If we had said or sung today's allotted Psalm, 98, you would, I know, appreciate what I am sharing with you today which is, the

**confidence** of the Easter story to light up other people's lives - and to pass it on! How does the psalm go?

“Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things...Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it, the lands and all who dwell therein. Let the rivers clap their hands and let the hills ring out with joy before the Lord.”

We are absolutely spoilt with scriptural texts and resources which tell us so powerfully that Golgotha was not the end at all, but a vibrant new beginning, and a new discovery of finding life out of darkness. God wills us to step up and take on the vocational life of service and sacrifice, however demanding or difficult.

And yes, taking up our roles on PCCs, Deanery Synods and the like, are a part of that calling and sacrifice! It may sometimes feel as humdrum as leafletting or knocking on doors to encourage households to vote for your favourite party, or Mayor, or Police Commissioner...

But remember that the Risen Christ walks with us today and empowers us to make a positive difference in God's world. Remember that the Risen Christ wills us to bring some colour and energy to the witness of His living, breathing Church today – which is you and me, and an angel or two, working in the background, getting a new canvas ready.

Amen.