Christening of Esme Rose

Sunday after Easter – 3rd April, 2016 – Hamilton

Thomas – often called ‘doubting Thomas’ as if that was a sort of crime – wants proof of the resurrection. ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails … I will not believe.’ He seeks ‘evidence-based’ faith. Jesus shows him and Thomas does believe – to which Jesus says, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe’

To see the evidence helps of course. But how do you measure the deeper things which faith – and Easter resurrection faith - is really about. I mean things like kindness and hope and generosity and sacrifice. How do we weigh the reality of these precious things so that we can say ‘Christ is Risen?

I’ve been very struck this Easter by some lines from the Welsh poet, RS Thomas, also an Anglican priest. He struggled – and he describes how he comes to his Easter faith like this:

*There have been times*

*When after long on my knees*

*in a cold chancel, a stone has rolled*

*from my mind , and I have looked in*

*and seen the old questions lie*

*folded and in a place by themselves*

*like the piled graveclothes of love’s risen body.*

All of this matters because Easter is the season for baptisms – we are ‘baptised into the death of Jesus that we may walk with him in the newness of his risen life.’ Resurrection faith – a faith of hope and promise - is the faith into which Esme Rose will be baptised today.

During the week, I read a piece about resurrection faith by Canon Giles Fraser in the Guardian. ‘Why do I cook bacon and eggs in our church for twenty homeless people?’ he asks himself. Because I believe in the resurrection. I believe in it by frying bacon and refusing to give up. It is the way we push back against the darkness of life.

It’s may be about evidence – but also about hope and possibility, determination and resilience

This is the sharp edge of the faith into which we are baptised. But of course there is much more. Esme Rose’s family is here today – her sister Eve and her cousins, uncles and aunts, parents and grandparents – all the way to Stephs’s grandparents and great great Aunt Esme whose name Esme carries and great great uncle Herbert. You may have watched Mary Berry preparing her Easter feast over the last week or two. So much of that was about family – about the traditional food of Easter and the memory of the previous generations who prepared it. There was simnel cake of course and hot cross buns. And Russian devilled eggs and Escovitch fish from the Caribbean and Easter men with traditional Dutch bread.

And so in our family today – there is the Christening cake which Steph’s Mum has baked and Mark’s mum has made Irish shortbread from a traditional recipe.

And those are all ways in which we can do a bit of what Thomas wanted – can I see it – can I touch it. In the food of Easter, we taste and see how gracious the Lord is. We taste, savour and learn to live the resurrection faith as it lives in our families.

And in the middle of a loving family – and in the middle of this church family which is so good at supporting young parents and their children, Esme Rose will be baptised. There is one more family link which is to my grandfather, Ernest, who was a priest of the church of Ireland. I don’t know whether Eve or Esme Rose will grow up to be preachers – Eve certainly has quite a bit to say. Ernest was ordained in 1911 – you will have seen the commemoration of the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916 – he wrote about his experiences of cycling through the debris with a loaf of bread on the back of his bicycle. And then he offered a vision to the generations who would come after:

‘I was happy as a child, but I am glad to think that my grandchildren will grow up in a world in which children are free as well as happy, in which what goodness there is is sincere, what religion there is is genuine, where, while there are great perils, there are great opportunities’

May his hopes be realised in the next generations – as we attempt to take into our lives and to live our baptismal faith in Jesus Christ crucified and risen.