

Easter Sunday - BUT

A reflection given on Easter Sunday, 9th April 2023 – by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster

Acts 10: 24-42; Luke 24:1-12

I have a question for you on this lovely Easter morning, which is I want to know what is your favourite word? I'm maybe taking a slight risk with this but tell me, do you have a favourite word? *[Jonathan takes the mike into the congregation]* Any of the children got a favourite word you'd like to share? Anybody got a good word? - 'Discombobulate' - Discombobulate. I like it. Yes. Excellent - 'Authenticity' - Authenticity. I like that one too. Any other favourite words? - *[Jonathan runs to the back - for Clive's word]* making me run here; good exercise; I've already been up the tower this Easter morning - 'Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious' - supercalifragilisticexpialidocious - even though the sound of it is something quite atrocious. Thank you for that, Clive! My favourite word is 'globule' - but I don't often get the chance to use it. *[Jonathan returns to in front of the altar, from where he speaks]* .

Even better than 'globule' and 'supercalifragilisticexpialidocious' and 'authenticity' and 'discombobulate' - is the little word 'but'. 'But' changes everything. You think you know where you're going with a sentence and then you throw in a but and it completely changes direction. 'I was going shopping today, but I slipped and banged my head and ended up in hospital' - 'But I met an old friend and we decided to go for a coffee instead' - 'But it was such a lovely day that I went to the seaside.' When I was at school my teachers hated it when I said 'but'. Baker, put your things away - but sir, I haven't finished; Baker, eat up your cabbage - but sir, it's making me ill; Baker, do your maths homework - but sir, we haven't done differential calculus yet. Every time I said 'but', I was trying to change what the teacher wanted me to do. And for me 'but' was a way of resisting and subverting those in authority. 'But' is what you say when you want a different result. And it's a word that appears in both of this morning's readings.

In Luke's Gospel we hear how Jesus is put to death on a cross and his body laid in a tomb. And the next chapter begins, 'But on the first day of the week...' And we know there's going to be a twist; we know that something unexpected is going to happen. And sure enough, the women find that the tomb is empty. And in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, 'but' is used in the same way, 'They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but...' And this but is followed by another short and even more powerful word, 'God' - 'But God' - if God is involved in this 'but' then anything can happen, 'They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day.'

'But God' tells us that the goalposts have moved; the rules have changed; we haven't reckoned with God getting involved - and now everything looks different. 'But God raised him' tells us that Jesus's death wasn't the end. And if Jesus's death wasn't final, then anything and everything can change; nothing is final or ultimate; everything is provisional; everything is open to review; everyone gets a second chance - all because of that 'but'. The worldly powers put Jesus to death by hanging him on a tree. They were saying 'no' to Jesus, no to God; 'no' to the peace and justice he represented; 'no' to the grace and forgiveness he displayed; 'no' to life

..... but God raised him on the third day and turns the world's 'no' into God's 'yes': 'yes' to Jesus; 'yes' to his life of compassion and love revealed on the cross; 'yes' to his message of healing and forgiveness; 'yes' to his kingdom of peace and justice.

So this Easter, let's make room in our lives for God to say, "But".

Whatever direction your life is taking, the God of the resurrection can turn it around. We all know what it is to mess up and get things wrong; we all have memories we would rather forget; we've all sometimes judged others and got them wrong; we've all put up barriers to try and keep ourselves safe and we found ourselves saying, "I can't; I won't; I have to say 'no'". But God takes all our 'nos' and takes them to the cross and this Easter morning he says 'yes'.

So let the God of the resurrection move the goalposts for whatever game you're playing this morning in your life. Let him change whatever direction it is you're heading in - the world put Jesus to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day.

So let that same God turn you around so you can say, "I can; I will; I want to say 'yes'"

Reading Texts

Acts 10:34-43

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Luke 24:1-12

¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." ⁸ Then they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened