

Dear Friends

I don't know if any of you have ever been to Tonbridge Swimming Pool, if you have, you will be aware that there are actually three pools. A small training pool, a separate 25m indoor pool which is linked to an outdoor pool via a swim through channel. The outdoor pool is closed from the beginning of November until the end of March, but it is clear that there are many who would sooner it remained open throughout the year. It's not surprising therefore, that at 6.30am on re-opening day, there is always quite a queue of folk anxious to be able to take an early morning dip.

However one year, as they started to swim along the channel from the indoor to the outdoor pools our intrepid swimmers were met with a very official looking sign. It read "Health & Hygiene Notice. In order to prevent cross contamination of the water from the different pools, swimmers are requested to get out and towel themselves down before re-entering the water". It's amazing how many people complied with this sign – not one of them remembering what the date was or realised that it might be a practical joke set by the admin officer and her manager.

1st April has always been a day when we remember many great practical jokes – who can forget Richard Dimbleby's Spaghetti trees or the Sun newspaper report that police were fitting cameras to Hawks in order to catch speeding motorists. Yet this year, 1st April should remind us of something that might seem even more far fetched than the cleverest of TV or Newspaper articles. That God decided to save mankind by sacrificing his only son to die on the cross but that three days later he came back to life.

However, for Christians around the world, this is definitely not a joke – it is very serious. In doing what he did, God not only showed the intensity of his love for us and the strength of his desire for us all to live in harmony with him and with one another but also showed us that it is possible to break through the chains of death and gives us the hope of eternal life with him.

But how is this possible? and why should we believe it? I hear many people ask.

Well the first thing to point out is that throughout the history of humankind we have consistently behaved in ways that are selfish, irresponsible or even downright bad – throughout the old testament we read various accounts of God trying to deal with this, however nothing worked because, although he is and always was a God of relationships, people somehow felt remote from him because they couldn't actually see him. Enter Christ – God in human form, someone who we could see, someone who folk could audibly listen to and be moved and uplifted by, someone who physically walked alongside others, noticing them, caring for them, healing them...loving them. Yet, despite all this, their innate selfishness and cowardice resulted in them putting him to death in the most horrific way.

Now before you say that this was all 2000 years ago, we weren't there so how can that affect us, well just think very carefully. Would any of us have had the courage to stand up and speak out in Christ's defence when all around were baying for his blood? Somehow I doubt it, which means that we are all as culpable, we are all as guilty as those who were there at the time. I wonder, how does this make you feel? Hopefully rather guilty, hopefully it will make you think again about the way that all of us behave as human beings and hopefully it will prompt us to ask for forgiveness and the chance to live the rest of our lives as better people who model themselves on the image that we are created in. The image of God in human form, an image of perfect love and relationships.

But what about the resurrection I hear you say? Surely that can't be true. Well, all I ask is for you to look at the evidence. Think about the disciples, the broken and scattered men who hid in fear for

their lives on that first Good Friday. Then think about the people who they became? Courageous, erudite and active founders of the Church that we now belong to. Do you really think that a practical joke could have given them such a tremendous change of heart and the willingness to follow Christ even to their own deaths? I know that I don't. I'm also convinced that it was the risen Christ who has helped countless others throughout history and insured that his worldwide Church remains living and active today.

I pray that you will all have a very good and uplifting Easter, and that you wont fall foul of too many April Fools jokes.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Irene".