

Last week in our 10 am service, Peter and Steph began by trying to get the congregation to think of some good news stories. It wasn't very difficult to do, but yet we rarely see good news stories in our newspapers. I was listening to the radio a few days ago, and the speaker was complaining about the way that the ratings of News programmes are evaluated the same way as entertainment programmes. So the more sensational and shocking the news can be made to seem, the better its ratings, and it is felt to be 'more successful'.

How did we get to this place, where bad news is more important than good? How did this sense of pessimism creep in? Well, it's certainly not anything new! In our gospel reading the people come to Jesus full of doom and gloom. They've just heard of a terrible event, when Pilate has killed worshippers and mixed their blood with the sacrifices, thus tainting them and, just as we would be when terrible things happen, they are full of questions:

Why did God let this happen?

Were these people being punished for something they'd done?

Jesus reminds them of another event that had happened recently: the collapse of a tower killing 18 people. This tower was the remains of the old Temple, a place where men who didn't like Roman rule worshipped as a kind of protest against the great Temple where Pilate and Herod held sway. Most people blamed Pilate for the Tower's fall. Jesus asks the people 'Do you think they were worse than all the others in Jerusalem?'

Was God angry with **those** people? We all have a tendency to look for reasons when something bad happens and when the Pilates of this world show how cruel they can be, we are intimidated. Even though we know hope is of God, we can somehow be more impressed by evil than by God's good.

Hope gives birth to life. Hope creates, using imagination and playfulness, but hope takes time. Jesus dispels fear wherever he encounters it, and offers hope to a hurting world. He tells the people a story to set against the dreadful things that have happened:

A man comes to check his fig tree (the fig tree is Israel's symbol, the tree that lives for centuries, the tree that has many fruiting times each year, it gives fruit and shade and holds onto life.) But this tree has no fruit.

Impatiently the man says to the gardener, 'It's been three years, and no fruit! Cut it down.' But the gardener says, 'Give it another year, and I'll fertilize it and hoe around it, and then come and see.'

Our patient gardener is God

And this tale is about growing hope

Hope, wrote Emily Dickinson, is the thing with feathers/ that perches in the soul/ and sings the tune without the words/ and never stops at all.

Preparing ourselves for Easter requires us to give up our pessimistic outlook, even death is defeated! Easter requires us instead to hoe around our own roots, to feed our hope and not our pessimism, and to bide our time, till what is fruitful in us can be seen.