

EASTER SERMON 2011.

On Good Friday evening Chris and I went to the Social Club for a drink, if you don't know the social club, you walk in and the bar is at the other end of a big room, so one has to walk down the room passing tables, quite often people say hello to those they know.....I often get 'Evening Vicar.'

But yesterday, being Good Friday I got a lot of banter, 'Saw you was looking a bit cross this afternoon. My response was 'No I've been in a good mood all afternoon.' 'Na I mean I saw you carrying a big cross down the main Road.' (Ha, Ha, Ha.)

" Ere Vicar, Ow many Televangelists does it take to change a lightbulb? One. But for the message of light to continue, send in your donation today."

" Nother one for your vicar, How many Amish does it take to change a light? Whats a light bulb? "

So we run the 'gauntlet' of jokes, then I get to the bar. "There you go Vicar one pint of Hobgoblin.....maybe we should get some Abbot Ale in for ya.....or maybe some Bishops Finger." (Ha, Ha, Ha.)

Well on Good Friday a group of people we normally sit with were not around.....but eventually I saw one of them come in from outside, I went up said that I thought they hadn't come out for a drink and she mentioned that they are all sitting in the back as it was a lovely afternoon. So I said Chris was talking to someone, but we would presently join them.

When I stepped out the door about fifteen people started seeing the song, ' All ways look on the bright side of life from The life of Brian. It took me a moment to make the connection with the film, and it being Good Friday.

I went home with that song on my mind.....then the next morning I awoke sleepy with a nose in my ear and a contented sigh. (My dog, not my husband.) The first song that came to mind was that song. (Lobotomy.)

But yesterday morning while I was in Church I was thinking about that song, and also thinking about our Gospel from Matthew this morning.....and I remembered

a story I heard a few years ago, that I would like to share with you all.....on this Easter morning.

It's a story about Angels,I must admit I love the biblical accounts of Angels, from the prophet Daniel, to the book of Revelation. But this one has always stayed with me.

It's called '*Angel of Death and Life.*'

The angel sat in the dark and waited.

This was the most unusual assignment he had ever received. Up till now his missions had always been straightforward_ keeping children from falling into wells, helping lost travellers find their way. Typical Guardian Angel stuff really.

But this job was very different, very different. A quick beam of light to mark the location, and a strange set of orders that simply said he should wait for his partner to arrive. Partner? He'd never had a partner before. He was big and strong and could do most things on his own. So he couldn't help wondering what this was all about.

And then the angel saw something.

The sun reached one long finger over the horizon and sure enough, there was someone coming towards him, wading slowly through the darkness like it was a thick black sea. Could this be his partner? If so, it was the most unusual angel he had ever seen.

No song. No shimmer. No shine. There was hardly a hint of heaven about him. Instead he was thin tired, a small grey mouse of an angel. Barely an angel at all.

The first angel raised his hand in a greeting. "Hello" he said, " My name is Candriel. Who are you?"

The second angel sat down beside his partner, but it was a minute or two before he spoke. And when he did it was in a whisper.

“My name is Destroyer.” He said solemnly. “I am the angel of death.”

An early morning breeze blew past the angels, but it was not a breeze that made Candriel shiver. He’d heard of this angel. Everyone had. How he’d killed the Egyptian first-borns and set God’s peoples free. But to look at him now, sitting there all grey and quiet, it hardly seemed possible.

Could this really be the Angel of death? Candriel wondered. And what kind of mission was this going to be?

“I suppose you have the orders?” Said Candriel uncertainly.

The Angel of death nodded and laid a bony hand on one of his pockets, “I do” he sighed. “But I was told not to open them until we saw women coming up the hill. It’s got something to do with a secret—a surprise.”

A partner. A signal. A surprise. This job gets stranger and stranger, to Candriel. But all he dared say was, “What do you suppose the orders are?”

The angel of death shook his head. ‘Oh that’s not hard to guess. All you have to do is look around?’

The sun’s bright scalp edged over the horizon, and Candriel looked they were in the middle of a graveyard.

“Death again,” Destroyer sighed, “Seems like death is always part of the job for me. So I guess it makes sense that I should play some part in this death too. The saddest death of all.”

Candriel looked again. The sun was a little higher now, and he could see it all clearly. The garden graveyard. The sleeping soldiers. The city of Jerusalem off in the distance, the huge stone that sealed the tomb beneath them.

“So you’ve guessed who’s in the tomb we’re sitting on”, said Destroyer.

“Jesus,” whispered Candriel “It’s Jesus, isn’t it Its God’s Son.”

A soldier grunted in his sleep.

“ I saw it happen, you know” said Candriel after a while, I saw him die on the cross. Our whole battalion was ready to burst through the sky, to uproot the cross tear it out of the ground, but they wouldn’t let us do anything. They said the signal had to come from him, but it never did. They did some awful things to him, he suffered a lot.”

Destroyer responded by saying there’s was other suffering going on. His mother was at the foot of the cross. I just wish that once I could have a mission where I remembered not sad and loss, but the kind of joy you have felt as a Guardian Angel.

Candriel did not know what to say so he just put his wing around Destroyer. They sat together in the sadness of the new days light. And Candriel saw the women walking up the hill.

“ Thats the signal,” he said. “ It’s time to read our orders.”

The angel of death reached into his pocket and handed the scroll to his partner. “ You read it”, he said. Candriel too took the scroll and started to unroll it. And then he read the scroll out loud.

“ Candriel,” the orders said. “Guardian Angel, kind and strong: you wanted so badly to free my Son from his cross. But that was not within your power. What is now within your power is to roll away the stone. Open his tomb and show the world that the one who died on the cross is now alive.....free from death forever! “As for you Destroyer, faithful servant, Angel of Death: someone needs to tell these women that the one they miss is alive. Who better to share this joyful news than the one who understands their sadness and loss?”

It took hardly a second. Candriel dropped the orders, leaped off the tomb, and rolled away the stone. Destroyer was right behind, climbing down after him into the grave. It was empty!

That’s when Candriel saw his partner change. The soldiers said it was an earthquake. They said they saw a flash of lightening. But Candriel knew different.

The sound that cracked the morning stillness was a sad whisper exploding into a shout of joy. And the light that stunned the soldiers was a grim, grey shadow bursting bright to white.

He is not here. He is risen! He is alive! Destroyer shouted to the women. And the angel of death became, forevermore, the angel of life.

This is just a children's story, but I also said that I couldn't get that song from the 'Life of Brian' out of my head yesterday, but actually when I was looking at this cross before leaving the church with Judy yesterday, I suddenly felt that because of Christ dying on the cross, we can indeed 'Look on the bright side of life.'

In the resurrection God acted with power to defeat death, and as our gospel today told us there was an earthquake, the earth shook. The angel appeared; the stone was rolled away, Caesars soldiers shook and became paralysed. The angel plopped himself down on the stone and said to the women, " Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said he would. Come and see the place where he lay."

The place where Jesus defeated death is not hidden from the history, an event shrouded in mist and shadow. No, the angel invites the women to " come and see the place where he lay." This was a real death, this was a real burial, and a just as real resurrection of the dead.

We too come to this place of worship on Easter looking for Jesus, as those women did on the first Easter morning. For we too want to know that death does not have the last word in our lives. We want to know that God has overcome death. And in this place, week in week out we tell again and again the greatest story of Jesus Christ, his victory over death in the resurrection. It is through the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus that salvation has come to the world.

We really do have a reason to 'look on the bright side of life, because Easter is God's victory over sin and death. Thanks be to God.Amen.

