

Easter Day Acts 5:27-32

This is always the time of year for a little good news – well Thursday was April Fool's Day, after all. Yahoo announced that due to the bad weather clocks were going to be moved forward another hour at midnight in a bid to kick-start the spring – and we could with it. And last year I liked BMW's newspaper advert on April 1st promoting their new energy saving system which allowed you (by means of special magnets) to hitch a free ride from the car in front of you, thus allowing you to turn your own engine off!

Actually, this year they went one better and on April Fool's Day advertised that you could get special BMW badges in red, blue or yellow to allow yourself to show your political colours in election year, the advert announced that they can be replaced "in a matter of seconds which is perfect for the floating voter"! Who says the Germans don't have a sense of humour!

But some good news is genuine and fact based, for example, girls, have you heard the good news this week? Yes, it has now been scientifically proven that eating chocolate every day can actually cut the risk of heart attack and stroke by 39%. What brilliant news for Easter Day!

The only thing is that if you go home and shovel down all your Easter eggs in one go, that won't help, what the scientists found was that you had to eat just one square of chocolate a day. Sorry.

But Easter Day is all about real genuine, provable good news. Do you remember a few weeks ago we looked at Peter? Weak, fallible, all too prepared in the heady surroundings of the high priest's courtyard to deny his association with Jesus? But move on a few weeks and come Acts chapter 5 we see quite a different man.

But it's odd, because exactly what Peter was afraid of that terrible night of Jesus' arrest had happened; because of his association with Jesus, Peter (along with the other Apostles) had been arrested by the religious authorities and thrown into the public prison. However, during the night an angel came to them, freed them and commanded them to "Go, stand in the temple courts...and tell the people the full message of this new life."

Now, if you've been sprung from prison, you run for it, don't you? Surely standing in the Temple courts preaching Jesus is a sure fire way of getting caught again? And that's exactly what happened. Peter and his friends are once again dragged in front of the Sanhedrin and the high priest – but, now, just look at the difference in Peter!

The high priest – Caiaphas, son-in-law of the all powerful Annas, says to Peter and the other Apostles, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name... Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

Caiaphas, like the first thief on the cross next to Jesus is still unwilling to accept the responsibility for his acts, his rebellion against God – his sin and he can't even bring himself to mention Jesus by name.

But what is Peter's response to this powerful man going to be? Is he deferential? Is he apologetic? Does he deny Jesus once again, ashamed to utter his beautiful name? No, he says, Gentlemen "We must obey God rather than men!"

And then better than a red, blue or yellow BMW badge, Peter and the other Apostles nail their colours firmly to the mast; "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead— whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.

God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.” (Acts 5:30-31)

You see, this is the message of new life that the angel commanded them to proclaim in full; eating a square of chocolate every day might extend your life, or might even give you a moment of pleasure in your life, but it won't bring you new life.

And don't be fooled by anything else, because there is nothing that can bring new life like Jesus. Can I tell you one of the saddest stories I read this week? It's about Keith Gough, a 58 year old baker who died from a heart attack on Good Friday. But it wasn't that Keith died at a young age, it's that he died searching for new life in the wrong place. You see, in June 2005 Keith and his wife won £9m on the Lottery, but the newsagent who sold him the winning ticket said that although "Goughie" was "a nice chap," after he won his millions "It all went down hill. He and his wife split. He did have a drink problem and it got progressively worse."

Keith Gough spent much of his winnings on racehorses, fast cars and an executive box at Aston Villa but last year he told the News of the World: "My life was brilliant. But the lottery has ruined everything. What's the point of having money when it sends you to bed crying? Now when I see someone going in to a newsagent I advise them not to buy a lottery ticket."

You see, the new life that something like a Lottery win promises is not new life in all its fullness, it is not new life for all eternity and often it can simply become a crushing disappointment. But in contrast the new life that Jesus is able to bring through his resurrection from the dead is something amazing – it is what the second thief on the cross experienced –

a new life where we might come to repentance of our sins and therefore know God's full eternal forgiveness.

So what is it that gives Peter such confidence to say all this? Well he tells us, "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:32)

There are people who will tell you that the resurrection of Jesus was all made up by the disciples, but surely if that were true, Peter would still be cowering in fear from the high priest. On the day that Jesus rose from the dead Peter ran to the tomb, he looked in and Luke tells us that Peter "wondered to himself what had happened" (Luke 24:12). If that is where it had ended, if Peter had only been left with an empty tomb, then I don't think that he would have had the nerve to say what he did to the high priest.

But since then Peter he has actually seen the risen Lord Jesus, he has encountered him, spoken with him, eaten with him and as a result received that amazing new life from Jesus in his name. Then as a believer he has also been given the gift of God's Holy Spirit to empower him to boldly live out his life as a follower of Jesus; "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Peter's good news, his full message of new life in the Risen Lord Jesus was genuine and fact based, he was no April fool because he had witnessed Jesus risen again from the dead and been empowered by God's Holy Spirit!

And from that day on Peter never swapped his badge of allegiance – an empty tomb and the Cross of Christ and proud to declare,; "Jesus Is Risen!" Now that is good news!