

Dear Friends,

Things go together; the old song said that 'Love and Marriage go together like a horse and carriage'. However I'm sure we can think of a whole host of similar couplets, such things as salt and pepper, gin and tonic and bread and butter are some obvious examples. Indeed once we get started they positively stream out of our minds like a proverbial tsunami.

Last month we heard of the death of the well known evangelist Billy Graham. There are very few people who have made a bigger impact over the last hundred years and in the context of the world of the Church, he is unrivalled. He is probably remembered for his visits to the UK beginning in 1954 when more than 2 million people went to hear him speak at the Haringey arena in London. A further 405 halls and churches carried live links via phone lines.

Billy Graham followed this with several other visits to the UK, 1955, 1961, 1966, 1967, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1985 and 1989. I never saw him in person, but in either 1966 or 1967 I remember going to the Granby Halls in Leicester to see him on a direct link with a big screen so we could see him in action. Then in 1984 I was a student at Queens College in Birmingham when there was a meeting at Villa Park. I can't recall why I didn't go to see him but I remember sitting in my study bedroom listening to him speaking via the radio. That year he visited a number of cities across England and the Churches across the country ran 'Operation Andrew'. The disciple Andrew seems to be regularly bringing people to Jesus in the Bible. Following this example, Operation Andrew was aimed at getting Christians to bring their non-Christian friends to hear Billy Graham speak hoping they too would get to know Jesus. The same 'crusade' saw a new hymn book developed with the launch of Mission England Praise, which has now evolved into Mission Praise, one of the hymn books used in Hallow Church.

The thrust of Billy Graham's preaching was very much the 'Cross'. His desire was to call all into a relationship with the Almighty God. He would tell us how God in His love for us, gave His Son to die on the Cross in our place. The Cross, for Billy Graham, was all that I wrote about in last month's magazine, the very centre of Christian faith. Indeed the reason why I started this letter with the couplets, that are so familiar, is that Billy Graham and the Cross go together in much the same way.

While the last magazine was being prepared the question was asked, "surely isn't it Easter Day that is the centre of the Christian faith?" This is a good question and needs to be asked. Easter Day is indeed a most wonderful day, to quote the title of a book by Michael Green, it is 'The Day that Death Died'. Easter Day is the day that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to each of His disciples, who were first dismayed and then amazed at His appearance. Easter Day is a day of startling transformation as sorrow, to use another couplet, is turned to joy.

However spectacular the Resurrection is, it only witnesses to the work of Jesus on the Cross. I say only but it is still spectacular. However the Resurrection is meaningless without the Cross. It was necessary for Jesus to undergo that ordeal to deal with sin and all other wrongs in the world for all time. However Father God fulfils His promise to His Son made in the Psalms 'Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay' (Psalm 16 vs 10). The Father brings His son gloriously from death to reveal that the work of the Cross was the victory Jesus claimed it to be when he shouted 'It is finished' just before He died.

So here then is my final couplet, Cross and Resurrection. They perhaps above all others need to go together. They are indeed really one event, the two sides of the same coin; you can't have one without the other. However Easter Day witnesses to the power of the Cross and the completed work of Jesus in bringing us to our salvation. All we need to do is to humbly accept the free gift of God's love to receive all that he wants to give us.

This is why we celebrate Easter with such unbridled joy. The hymns of the Resurrection shout of the joy and glory of the victory of Jesus over sin and death, 'The Price is Paid' (Graham Kendrick), 'Thine be the Glory, Risen, Conquering Son' (Charles Wesley), 'Who did Once upon the Cross, suffer to redeem our loss' (14<sup>th</sup> Century), 'The strife is O'er the Battle done' (16<sup>th</sup> Century) and

finally 'See God's Salvation Plan, Wrought in Love, Borne in Pain, Paid in Sacrifice' (Stuart Townsend and Keith Getty) to give just a few examples over the years.

Christ has died,  
Christ is Risen  
Christ will come again.

May the Lord richly bless you.

Robert