



Image of the day - Christ before Pilate
by Tintoretto, 1566-1567

Easter Hope: Joint message from the Archbishops of Armagh

The Most Revd John McDowell and The Most Revd Eamon Martin say -

One of the words which we associate most strongly with Easter is “hope”. It is a word that has become a bit debased in the way we use it nowadays. “I hope so,” very often means “I would like to think this or that might happen, but I doubt if it will.” Nothing could be further from the victorious and positive nature of our Easter hope.

Easter falls at a season of the year that is full of hopefulness. Longer evenings, Spring flowers, birdsong, and the sap rising in the trees. The whole creation (at least in the Northern hemisphere) is bursting with hope and the promise of new life. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead brings that hope to a new level of reality. Far from the resurrection being simply a metaphor that religious people use for natural renewal, as some believe, it is the yearly renewal of the Earth in



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Spring which is an anticipation of the resurrection; a sign pointing to something greater than itself. A shadow in search of a substance. Transience moving towards permanence.



That is how the creator God has imprinted something of himself into the fabric of the world. He has made it full of intimations of eternity, for instance in beauty and in music which are where many of us find the strongest suggestions of intense joy and infinity. These created things won't fulfil our yearning for eternal fellowship with God, but they will arouse it, and prepare us to find it unexpectedly, in the servant life and death of Jesus Christ.

Even today there are other signs all around us, not this time in nature or in music, but in the human lives which our eyes have been opened to value, often for the first time.

It has been a tough year since last Easter, and many people, Christians and others, have found ways of making the best of a bad job by helping one another in ways that we haven't been used to doing before. We've also found ways to show our appreciation and admiration for people who we don't usually think about. They aren't sports people, or billionaires or even politicians. They are nurses and delivery drivers and people toiling in cavernous warehouses and food factories for very low wages. People who serve the

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fundamental needs of God's world. And, in its own way their hidden service is a shadow of the resurrection life; the life of heaven, God's place. Our sure and certain hope.

Church 'faces huge threat from cancel culture' - Archbishop of Canterbury

Cancel culture is a "huge threat" to the future of the Church of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury has said, as he defended the right to freedom of speech.

Wading into the "culture wars" debate last night, the Most Rev Justin Welby expressed alarm at the growing scale of censorship in the UK, singling out the "very, very dangerous" trends that have emerged in universities.

In a wide-ranging interview, he warned that the process of cancelling or "no-platforming" speakers or people whose "views you dislike" could "very quickly" lead to "cancelling everyone who disagrees".

Amid a growing debate over the tearing down of statues and memorials to controversial historical figures, he said the Church had identified "one or two" that were "really terrible" and would be moved to museums, but added that "we cannot cancel history".

"The past is a reality. I think cancel culture is a huge threat to the life of the Church," he told the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*. "We need to be able to express truths or to express our views, whether they're good or bad."



The Archbishop also said that there was a need to uphold the right to free speech when asked about the

row over the showing of the picture of the Prophet Mohammed at Batley Grammar School in West Yorkshire.

While describing blasphemy as a “morally bad choice” he pointed out that the Church had supported the abolition of blasphemy laws in the UK, adding that Muslim leaders across the country had urged protesters not to resort to violence or threats.

‘We can’t erase the past. It’s impossible. We have to learn from it sometimes. We have to repent of it quite often’

Asked whether the debate over Brexit was now over, he said that Covid-19 had helped the country to move on from the divisions of the past five years, joking that he was a “Remainer” but not a “Remoaner”.

However, with tensions between the UK and Brussels escalating over vaccine supplies, he warned that “vaccine nationalism” was now the “most enormous danger”. With the

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Church committed to reviewing its stance on homosexuality by 2022, Mr Welby refused to answer when pressed on whether same-sex marriages could soon be allowed.

Describing the process as “incredibly complex and rather delicate”, he added: ‘I’m simply not going to answer that question because it would prejudge where we might get to, and that would mean that we’d have a lot more trouble getting there.’”

Pressed over his thoughts on the cancel culture movement, the Archbishop told the newspaper: “We can’t erase the past. It’s impossible. We have to learn from it sometimes, often, always. We have to repent of it quite often. But we cannot erase it.

“We cannot cancel history. We cannot cancel differences of opinion.

“Particularly for universities, it seems to me very, very dangerous because you start with cancelling some views that you dislike and very quickly, you are cancelling everyone who disagrees. It’s a very dangerous process.”

On the protests in Batley, he continued: “In this country we abolished the blasphemy laws not long ago, in the past 20 years. And the Church of England was one of those who supported the abolition of the blasphemy laws.

“Yes, there can be conflict and, in some parts of the world, you have to be very careful what you say because people feel very, very strongly. But in this country, I think, we have to hold on to freedom of speech.”

He added: “We have very good relationships with Muslim leaders across the country.

“Many of them are very upset by the cartoons that were shown but also many of them have said ‘no violence, no threats, make it clear that you disagree strongly, but no violence, no threats’.

“In other words, exercise your freedom of speech but don’t prevent other people exercising from their freedom of speech.”

BBC preaching to the converted with ‘God slot’

The BBC has relegated religion to the “God slot” and should be including it in dramas and documentaries, according to the Bishop of Ripon.

The Rt Rev Dr Helen-Ann Hartley said faith has been “siloeed off” to Songs of Praise and a handful of other programmes.

‘If most of the content fails to get beyond the ‘God slot’, what is the point?’

The BBC has promised “more content than ever before” to celebrate Easter this year, including a message from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope delivering a blessing live from Rome.

Writing in Radio Times, Bishop Hartley said: “This is great news for those who have been denied the chance to

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worship in person during the pandemic. But it is, also, the BBC literally preaching to the converted.



“It’s all very well having more content than ever before, but if most of it fails to get beyond the ‘God slot’ normally reserved for Songs of Praise, what’s the point, beyond keeping the faithful happy?”

“Where are the documentaries that challenge us to rethink the world we live in? Or the dramas that ask us to re-imagine our human relationships?”

“Instead of congratulating itself on producing more content than ever, I wonder if it’s time for the BBC to ask just what is the point of religion on the telly, or the radio for that matter?”

Bishop Hartley added: “I want to be part of a conversation, not siloed off in a single-interest world-view.”

The bishop is chair of the Sandford St Martin Trust, which celebrates programmes that put faith and ethics at their centre. Examples of good BBC practice cited by the Trust include *The Windermere Children*, a drama about young

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Holocaust survivors brought to England in 1945; and Once Upon A Time In Iraq, the BBC Two documentary series.

The Trust also singled out Channel 4's It's A Sin, which did not deal directly with religion but "reveals the power of community, compassion and love".

37 aid agencies raise the alarm about skyrocketing needs among Syrians, as humanitarian funds are cut

37 aid agency including Christian Aid, Trocaire, Oxfam, World Vision International and Save the Children issued the following statement on March 30 -

Today's pledged funds are urgently needed by millions of Syrians at home and dispersed across the region. They are needed now more than ever. While we welcome countries' pledges that have kept their funding at similar levels to last year's or increased it, as did Germany, it is extremely disappointing to see two major donors, the UK and the US, turn their back on the plight of Syrians. This will have a devastating impact on their lives.

Syrians are facing record food insecurity levels and declining socio-economic conditions. Needs have increased dramatically over the last year. Over 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, with 12.4 million food insecure and another 1.8 million at risk of becoming so. 12 million people are in need of health assistance, yet health care facilities continue to come under

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attack. During a pandemic, 12.2 million lack regular access to clean water, while almost 6 million are in need of shelter.

We urge donors to renew and increase support shown to date, to maintain and increase humanitarian access - both within Syria and across its borders - and we call on parties to the conflict to uphold the ceasefire, especially in northern Syria.

Sir David Suchet reads 879 Bible verses at Westminster Abbey



Actor Sir David Suchet CBE has read the whole of St John's Gospel at Westminster Abbey for its upcoming Easter Sunday service. The book, which contains 879 verses, was read from the abbey's renowned Jerusalem Chamber.

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The recording will be broadcast as a streamed premiere via the abbey's website at 4pm [here](#).

Sir David Suchet said: "I count it as a great privilege to be filmed reading St John's Gospel in the iconic Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey."

The Dean of Westminster, the Very Rev Dr David Hoyle, said: "When the translators of the 'King James' Bible met to agree the final text, they tested it 'by ear'; they read it aloud. Hearing the gospel is not the same as reading it and having David Suchet read John, in the Jerusalem Chamber, is both exciting and compelling."

Best-known for playing Agatha Christie's fictional detective Hercule Poirot, Sir David became a Christian in 1986 after reading a hotel room Bible. He has read the entire Bible before, for Hodder & Stoughton's NIV Audio Bible, which has sold over 100,000 copies worldwide - and a previous reading of the whole of St Mark's Gospel at St Paul's Cathedral has received over 1.5 million views online.

The Jerusalem Chamber has a long history with Bible translation. It hosted the translation committee for King James I's Authorized Version of the Bible in 1611, who read the full Bible aloud in the final stages of their work.

Unionist challenge to NI protocol to be heard in court

A legal challenge by unionists against the Westminster Government over the Northern Ireland Protocol is on course to end up in the High Court after ministers dropped their opposition to the case being heard.

The judicial review, which is being pursued by the leaders of the three main unionist parties in Northern Ireland and Lord Trimble, one of the architects of the Good Friday Agreement, is likely to be heard from May 13 to 18.

The group, which includes Arlene Foster, Northern Ireland's First Minister, are seeking to challenge the legality of the post-Brexit trading arrangements which were set up to reflect the province's dual status of being in the UK internal market while continuing to apply many EU rules.

The protocol has been blamed for disrupting trade for businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland, with Boris Johnson facing calls from prominent unionists for it to be overhauled.

The litigants argue that it also flies in the face of the Act of Union 1800 and the Good Friday Agreement, and have challenged the way in which Northern Ireland will be asked to provide consent for the protocol continuing or ending in 2024.

John Larkin QC, the former attorney general of Northern Ireland, has been instructed to seek a judicial review.

Books, Broadcasts, resources and webinars

Canterbury Cathedral Easter broadcasts

Millions of viewers will be able to join Archbishop Justin Welby live for the Easter Day service thanks to a

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collaboration between the Cathedral, the BBC, and the Church of England. Join the services at:
08.10 on @BBCRadio4. 10.00 on @BBCOne



Easter from Kings

“We're looking forward to Easter from King's this weekend, for which our choristers are joined by the wonderful The King's Singers.

“For UK viewers it'll be on BBC Two on Saturday evening, and for international friends it's available here: “.

<https://bit.ly/EfK2021>

PIECES of the PASSION - journeying with Bach through Holy Week.

An aria a day performed by Julian Godlee (bass) and Brenda Blewett (piano), well known Home Stage artists.

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Take time each day to pause and reflect, as you listen to Bach's sublime music from St Matthew and St John Passion and the Mass in B minor.

Followed by an Easter Day treat when Julian and Brenda will perform 2 uplifting spirituals.

A new recording available each day from 10am between 29 March - 4 April.

Each recording will be 5-10 minutes long.

Here is the link to what else is on at the Glaven Valley Churches: <https://glavenvalleychurches.org.uk/whats-on/>

To watch recordings live, please visit the Home Stage Facebook or YouTube Page. If you missed today's, the next will be live at 10am tomorrow morning.

To watch the playlist, please visit the link below:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ7j7uCNpok&list=PL3HKcB8onU2wJ2HnHTEH3PEz0Z1--OisK)

[v=qQ7j7uCNpok&list=PL3HKcB8onU2wJ2HnHTEH3PEz0Z1--OisK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ7j7uCNpok&list=PL3HKcB8onU2wJ2HnHTEH3PEz0Z1--OisK)

Media review

Revealed: the astonishing range of languages spoken in schools in NI

Belfast Telegraph

Eight per cent of pupils in Northern Ireland don't speak English as their first language at home, new statistics from the Department of Education have revealed.

Polish and Lithuanian are the most widely spoken common languages after English.

But despite over 7,000 pupils now attending Irish medium schools, only 529 pupils have their home language listed as Irish.

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And only seven pupils in total across Northern Ireland use Ulster Scots as their means of communication with family. Indeed, more children speak Marathi and Gujarati, which are spoken in India, or even Igbo from Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea.

Five even speak Zulu with their parents at home.

Polish remains the second most common first language of Northern Ireland's schoolchildren, figures obtained by the Belfast Telegraph reveal.

The number of pupils in primary, post-primary and special schools with Polish as their home language was 6,983, a rise from 6,671 in 2017/18.

Lithuanian is the third most common with 3,101 speakers, up from 2,797 in 2017/18.

English is spoken as a first language by 312,336 pupils (92%).

Sammy Wilson: Vaccine offer shows Irish Republic that UK – not EU – is its true friend

Belfast News Letter

<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/politics/sammy-wilson-vaccine-offer-shows-irish-republic-that-uk-not-eu-is-its-true-friend-3181519>

Salisbury Cathedral vaccination music album

ITV

Report that Salisbury Cathedral, which has been a vaccination centre for a number of months, is to release an album of music that has been played to people waiting for their vaccination. Proceeds will go to NHS Charities Together.

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[<https://www.itv.com/news/2021-03-29/salisbury-cathedral-releases-album-of-organ-music-played-during-covid-vaccinations>]

Independent watchdog to police abusive priests

The Times

The Church of England has acknowledged that bishops cannot be trusted to investigate their own priests and will bring back “defrocking” to kick out paedophiles, in an overhaul of how sexual abuse cases are handled.

Bishops will be stripped of their powers to investigate and punish abuse cases after a critical report last autumn found that the church had harboured hundreds of paedophiles over almost 70 years and that allegations against priests had routinely been ignored, minimised or dismissed by church leaders.

[[] <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/independent-watchdog-to-police-abusive-priests-bv3cmqhx9>]

Report into new research on the extent of problem gambling

Daily Telegraph

[<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/03/29/one-eight-britons-risk-problem-gambling/amp/>]

The Guardian view on ‘post-Christian’ Britain: a spiritual enigma

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/28/the-guardian-view-on-post-christian-britain-a-spiritual-enigma>

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Opinion - Sinn Fein has made second-class citizens of NI's rule followers - Suzanne Breen

Strip away the sectarian cacophony surrounding Bobby Storey's funeral because the issues at the heart of this controversy have nothing to do with orange or green.

A massive funeral was given to a high-profile figure at the height of the pandemic in breach of health guidelines. It wasn't a spontaneous event, it was meticulously organised. Those who helped draw up the regulations publicly flouted them.

From having seen plans of the funeral, the PSNI knew well in advance what would occur but did not act to prevent it. Despite thousands on the streets, and everything being captured on camera, it all took an inordinate amount of time to investigate and, nine months later, the decision has been taken to prosecute nobody.

The conclusion that everyone is not equal under the law is the only logical one that can be reached in this sorry state of affairs. This is not about the outrage of Sinn Fein's political rivals.

It is about the suffering and sacrifice made by ordinary families across Northern Ireland — unionist, nationalist and neither — during this pandemic. Those who abided by the rules for the greater good. Those who didn't hold wakes, who didn't attend funerals, who stood heartbroken saying

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goodbye outside locked cemetery gates because they thought it was the right thing to do.

On June 26, the PSNI was aware of 400 people in the area of the Storey home but did not intervene.

Public health advice was clearly against holding any wakes, let alone one of such a size. The hundreds of men and women in black-and-white clothing on the funeral route again showed there was a highly organised event.

It is impossible for police to justify letting such a massive funeral unfold that it had prior knowledge of. What moral authority do officers have now to stop someone going for a walk on a beach, visiting a relative, or sitting with their friends in the park?

The PSNI and Sinn Fein have made a mockery of Covid regulations, and shattered confidence in the rule of law. Far from friction existing between the two, a close and cosy relationship in this instance has been exposed.

Arlene Foster has said that Simon Byrne's position as Chief Constable is “untenable”, and she is calling on him to resign. Yesterday's decision will make life difficult for the First Minister who is trying to maintain a smooth relationship with Michelle O'Neill despite growing grassroots unionist discontent.

The Deputy First Minister has once again said sorry for any hurt caused by the Storey funeral. But Sinn Fein still hasn't explained why it thought Covid regulations didn't apply to its dead.

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Other political parties did not act so arrogantly. The SDLP respected the guidelines for the funerals of John Hume and John Dallat.

So too did the DUP when Edwin Poots lost his father Charlie, and Jeffrey Donaldson buried his father Jim. The pain and loss of Bobby Storey's family, friends and comrades were no greater than that of anyone else's in this pandemic.

Sinn Fein had the chance to ensure that public health guidelines were upheld at his funeral. Instead, it made second-class citizens of everybody else who had followed the rules.

Courtesy of the Belfast Telegraph. 31.03.2021. Suzanne Breen is the Telegraph's Political Editor.

Poem for today

Sin like a raging fever, reigns
With fatal strength in every part
The dire contagion fills the veins
And spreads it's poison to the heart.

And can no sovereign balm be found?
And is no kind physician nigh
To ease the pain and heal the wound,
Ere life and hope for ever fly?

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There is a great physician near.
Look up, o fainting heart, and live.
See, in his heavenly smile appear
Such ease as nature cannot give!

See in the Saviour's dying blood
Life, health, and bliss abundant flow!
'Tis only this dear sacred flood
Can cleanse the heart, and heal it's woe.

Anne Steele (1717-1778)



Pointers for prayer

Eternal God, in the sharing of a meal
your son established a new covenant for all people, and in
the washing of feet
he showed us the dignity of service.
Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit

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these signs of our life in faith
may speak again to our hearts,
feed our spirits, and refresh our bodies. Amen.

Lord God,
You sent your Son into the world,
And before his hour had come,
He washed his disciples' feet.
You had given all things into his hands.
He had come from you, and was going to you,
And what did he do?
He knelt down on the floor,
And washed his friends' feet.
He was their teacher and their Lord,
Yet he washed their feet.
Lord God, help us learn from his example;
Help us to do as he has done for us.
The world will know we are his disciples
If we love one another.
Strengthen our hands and our wills for love
And for service.
Keep before our eyes the image of your Son,
Who, being God, became a Servant for our sake.
All glory be to him who lives and reigns with you and the
Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever.
Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on
the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within
the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit
that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those

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who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul

While Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people dropping their gifts in the collection box. Then a poor widow came by and dropped in two small coins. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”

Luke 21:1-4 NLT

Jesus is only a few days from his death on the cross. He knows what is going to happen and it must have been

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dominating his thinking. And yet he noticed a poor widow. I suspect that no one else spotted her because everything about her was unremarkable, and particularly her gift. It was such a tiny gift and most people would have thought that it was hardly worth giving. But Jesus saw it very differently. Alongside the big gifts of the rich people hers was a very, very small gift but Jesus looks to the heart of the matter. The fact is that she gave everything she could. She had, in truth, given more than anyone else.

This beautiful little story is so precious because it gives us a deep insight into how Jesus works. He looks to the heart of things. What we are able to give will often appear small and insignificant, particularly when we put it alongside the enormous needs of our society. When you look at the number of people with addiction, or broken relationships, or sickness, it doesn't look very impressive when you are only able to give a little help to one person. But Jesus looks at our heart. He sees our desire to serve him and he celebrates what we have done.

This story warns us never to look down on what we can do. Listening to someone in need, giving a small gift, praying for a friend, doing shopping for an elderly neighbour, supporting a charity or whatever it may be Jesus looks to us to do what we can – and he sees our heart.

QUESTION

Why is it so damaging to look down on the small things that we can do for God?

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PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you that you value and bless what we are able to do, however small. Amen.

