

Easter Sunday Eucharist 2018

What happened to the bad guys? asked the Beaver Scout.

I'd just been telling them the Easter story, earlier this week. And they were full of questions. Who made God? Were there no chocolate eggs at the last Supper? Where does the Easter Bunny fit into the story?

But then one popped up: what happened to the bad guys? The ones who killed Jesus. To Judas, and Caiaphas, and Pilate. It's a question which has stayed with me all week.

Just as it stayed, in fact, with the first Christians who made up all sorts of stories about what happened to the bad guys.

Pilate, some said, had been driven mad by his regret over the death of Jesus, and in the end took his own life. Others said he was executed, by an Emperor who thought the killing of Jesus a terrible crime. Either way, when they tried to throw his body away into the river Rhine, even the water itself rejected him. He was so evil, so cursed, that nature could not stand him and vomited him up.

Interestingly, there's another story, especially popular in the eastern Church, which goes quite differently. Yes, Pilate was tortured by guilt over Jesus: so much so that in the end he converted, and became a Christian. He even gave his life for Jesus, telling the Emperor to his face that there was now a new Lord. Pilate the Christian martyr. Pilate the Christian saint.

No such luck for Caiaphas and Judas. They, unlike Pilate, were Jews and no Christians were interested in dreaming up happy endings for Jews. There are children present, so I won't detail the horrible, gruesome deaths, and fates beyond death, which Christians imagined for Judas and Caiaphas. Suffice it to say that what happened to the bad guys was *bad*. Cold and terrible, eternal vengeance.

And I tell you all this this morning because it is a great example of the church getting something nearly, totally, 100% wrong. Of it quite failing to understand its own Gospel, and what we're celebrating this morning.

Because Easter means that the answer to the question, 'what happened to the bad guys?' is: *Jesus happened. Jesus happened to the bad guys.*

Because what happened on Easter morning is that God took Jesus – the way he lived, the way he died, and everything about him, and said *Yes*. This is me. This how I am, this is how I work. From now on, when you think of me, think of Jesus. If you want to see me, look at Him. If you want to know me, know Him. I am in Him, and He is in me. He's what I look like, put into your world. He's me, to you.

And that means - for Caiaphas, for Pilate, for Judas and for each and every one of us – that means that in the end, it's Jesus that happens to us.

He happens when we die. If we haven't met him before then, we will.

And He will be to us then everything He was in the Gospels. He will be loving, and He will be fierce. He will bind up our wounds, and He will break our pride. He will take us as we are, and He will change us beyond our imagining.

He happens when we die, and He starts to happen now, if you will let Him. *He is alive*. He's not just waiting at the end of time: He is here *now*, waiting to love, to bind, to break, to change. Waiting to *happen* to us, in us. That's what we're part of the church for: this is where we think He happens. In baptism. In bread and wine. In living and learning and praying together.

What happens to the bad guys, asked the Beaver Scout. And when she's a bit older, she'll know that the bad guys are not just Judas and Caiaphas and Pilate, but all of us. All of us who have gone wrong, failed somehow, become trapped in little ways of selfishness and sadness, or just lost our hope and joy along the way. What happens to the bad guys? What happens to the broken ones, the tired ones, the lost ones?

Jesus happens. The one who is awesomely powerful, awesomely gentle, the one who is perfect justice and perfect mercy, the one who will not hurt and humiliate and destroy, the one who gave himself for us all, the one who is tender and kind: Jesus happens.

So there's good news for Pilate, and Caiaphas, and Judas. Good news for you and for me.

Not one of us now is defined by the worst thing we've done.

Not one of us now lives in a world without mercy and hope.

Not one of us must just be ourselves, trapped in our failures and misery.

Not one of us is doomed, because *Jesus happens*.

And our great Easter hope is that He will happen in every single human heart, in every dark and desperate place; in every broken and defeated life; in every body lying in the graveyard: *Jesus happens*.

So this Easter, if you've never asked before, ask Him. Ask Him to happen in your life. Ask Him to happen in the lives of those around you. I won't say that things will change instantly. Sometimes they do, often they don't. Change can take a long, long time to come. It might take more than your lifetime. But one day, if you go on asking him, you will be healed. You will be made new. You will be made life, and peace, and joy, because *Jesus happens*.

So ask him. Ask him to happen in you.

To the risen Jesus be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Peter Waddell