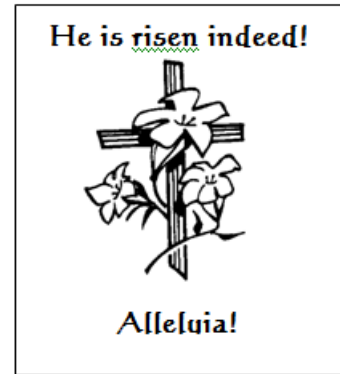


The Easter Hope...

As I write this, my desk is bathed in sunshine, the sky is blue, the birds are feeding at the birdfeeder, the frogs have appeared in the pond and the garden is filled with the bright colours of daffodils and crocuses. Just ten days ago, it was very different - snow was falling when I woke up, and kept on falling throughout the day to a depth of four inches. The snow didn't hang around long but it was a reminder that winter can reappear with very little warning and catch us all unawares. Just when we think that we can put away our winter jumpers or start planting in the garden, we discover that we've been over-optimistic! Even on a beautiful day when it seems as though spring is here to stay, I am reminded of years when we've had snow on Easter Day. When I was a Vicar in Ashton-under-Lyne, we used to go up to Mossley Cross for a sunrise service on Easter Day. It was a wonderful way to celebrate Christ's resurrection, watching the sun slowly rise up over the hills, followed by a cooked breakfast back at church. However one year, we couldn't get there because the snow had fallen so deeply and it wasn't possible to get up the hill. We still had the cooked breakfast, but Easter didn't feel quite the same that year!



During Lent, some of us have been studying CS Lewis' book, the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe. For those who don't know the story, four children go to stay in a house the country during the second World War and they discover a new world called Narnia through the back of a wardrobe. Narnia is covered in snow and they soon discover that 'it's always winter and never Christmas'. The cause for this is the evil White Witch who rules the kingdom by fear. As the story progresses, the children discover that they are to be the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy and that when they become kings and queens of Narnia, the Witch's power will be no more. They also meet Aslan the Lion, who has been absent from Narnia during the Witch's reign but who is on the move again. As the story progresses and the children and Aslan join together to overthrow the evil that has gripped Narnia for so long, the snow starts to melt and spring appears.

There are many similarities between Aslan and Jesus in this story – including the deeply sad scene when Aslan agrees to the White Witch's demand for a sacrifice and he dies at her hand. However, just as Jesus' death on the cross wasn't the end for him, Aslan's death isn't the end. He comes back to life and helps the four children defeat the White Witch and her mighty army and evil is driven out of Narnia.

In Narnia, the cold of winter is associated with fear and suspicion that is relentless with no Christmas to lift the spirits. The coming of spring, the sunlight, trees bursting into leaf and blossom, butterflies flitting around, heralds a new age of peace, justice and joy where goodness reigns supreme.

As the group of us journeyed through the story for five weeks, we saw, again and again, the Easter story played out. The story of people who had hopes and dreams for a better future, who yearned for a saviour to come and release them from the grip of evil, who experienced the deep sorrow of the death of the one they thought would rescue them only to discover that death could not hold him back and that in the end love would win over evil. This is the story of Narnia and Aslan and this is the story of us and Jesus. For Jesus is risen indeed. Through his death and resurrection we have entered a new age of peace, justice and joy. And for that we can shout 'Alleluia'!

However, God's kingdom is not fully here on earth yet, but because of Easter we have been given a foretaste of a world where love reigns. We are called to join with God in building a world where love is at the heart of everything and our Archbishops have called us to make this a particular focus in the week before Pentecost. (You can read more about this elsewhere in this magazine.) As an Easter people, with hearts full of joy this Eastertide as we proclaim once more that 'Jesus is risen indeed, Alleluia' may we look out for those opportunities where we can bring peace and justice into our home, our community, our world. Let us pray for world where there isn't a perpetual 'winter' of fear and suspicion, but for one where love melts even the coldest of hearts.

Jo

PS If you haven't read the book of 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' or watched the film, let me know as I have a couple of books and DVDs you could borrow – I'm sure you'll enjoy it!

