

A letter to William

In Easter 2020, we were all in lockdown. A friend who had moved to Sweden was not so lucky. He and his family of four were free to move about, but were all ill with what we now know to be coronavirus. They have since returned home and are in full health.

I was emailed during Holy Week by my friend with three questions from his son, aged six. They are not regulars at church, so the curiosity, to my mind, was an opportunity. The remainder of this homily is my reading of my replies to young William's questions:

Why did they want to kill Jesus?

Why didn't they just kill his dad since he's the one with all the power?

What's the story with the Easter Bunny? Why a bunny for Easter?

Dearest William,

Lovely to receive your email yesterday. Sweden is such a long way away from Christchurch – it is amazing isn't it how you can ask a question from all the way up there, and I can receive it in seconds, and then reply, and you get my response so quickly.

Dad tells me you have all been a bit under the weather at home the past few weeks. You are all feeling better now, I hope? We all need to stay at home when we are feeling unwell. Sometimes we get tired of being at home, but home is the best place to be – all the clever doctors and scientists tell us this, so well done on listening to them and staying safe.

I very much appreciated your questions. They are very good questions. I wonder what Easter is like in Sweden? It must feel different all the way up there from how it does when you are all the way down here in New Zealand. I think your questions though are very much like the sort of questions young people here might ask. I am going to have a go at answering them, but dear William be assured whatever I say is not the final word. I have some clever friends (they are neither doctors nor scientists) who would be better able to give you the answers you seek, but I will have a go because it is too early in the morning to ring them up and ask.

You asked: Why did they want to kill Jesus?

I think partly the answer is they feared him. Fear can make people do the strangest things. In New Zealand, fear made everyone run out and buy lots of loo paper the other week – some people filled their trolleys with nothing else. It all seems quite silly, doesn't it? But fear, like I said, makes people do strange things.

I think people feared Jesus because he talked about things not being as they should be. He kept on challenging the way people thought and acted. He was especially keen to see that everyone felt they were important and worthy of love, even the people who did not feel very good about themselves. When you read about Jesus in the Gospels (Dad

will show you where you can read these stories), he is always going about loving people – making them feel special. More than this, he encourages everyone else to do the same.

Sometimes, he says to the people around him you are going to have to love others even at a cost to yourself. Like when you are asked to share your sweets with your sister, or Dad wants to watch cricket and you want to watch Disney and you say – “Okay Dad, you watch some cricket”.

Jesus says there is always enough love to go round, and can never run out, and the best thing you can do is share it. But some people, like me, maybe you, get it in their head there is only so much, and if we share, we will miss out. He says this is not true. But people fear this, and they fear they might have to change the way they live in order to share.

I think that is why they want to kill him. If he is dead, then he won't be able to talk this way, and they won't need to change. But – and this is the Easter story in a nutshell – he still keeps talking, he still keeps saying what he always said, only now he has thousands and millions of other people talking with his voice.

How unexpected is that? In a very real way, what they wanted to do by killing him – make him quiet – has backfired and his voice is louder now than ever.

April 9, 2020

You asked: Why didn't they just kill his dad since he's the one with all the power?

I think this is the hardest question you asked. It is a very good question because it is so hard. That is often the way with questions don't you find?

Often, hard questions can have different answers, depending on who we ask, and what time of day we ask them. I'll have a go, but because your question is such a good one, you should keep asking it, to me, to as many people who talk about Jesus as you can. You can even ask it of people who don't talk about Jesus a whole lot – they usually have lots to say in answering this.

There are some very interesting stories about Jesus and who his mum and dad were, but one thing we know is that Jesus talked about how his Father was one in heaven. Heaven is the name we give for something that is really very mysterious. When we imagine something we have never seen, we use images, or things we have seen. Often this means what we imagine is not exactly the same as what is there. Heaven, I think, is like this – whatever we imagine, close as it may be, is not the same as what heaven is – that is why we call it mysterious.

Jesus said his Father was one in heaven – and, furthermore, because he said many things which were mysterious, Our Father (You and me) was the same as his. That's confusing, isn't it. Your dad's name is Jesse and mine was George, but Jesus says you

and I, and Jesse and George, Susie, The Queen of England, the man who asks for money outside the train station, everyone, is a child of the Father in heaven. That sounds pretty amazing, doesn't it. Even more amazing than emails from Sweden to New Zealand in seconds.

Now, the thing about what Jesus said about his Father – remember he said in a mysterious and amazing way that everyone is one of this Father's children – the thing is, just like you said in your question, all the power in the world and beyond belongs to this Father. This Father is the source of all living things, you and mummy, the rivers, the trees, the planets, the air we breathe, everything.

It seems to me, those fearful people thought it much easier to kill Jesus than try and take on the source of everything. Could it even be done, do you think? To take away everything, all that the Father in heaven represents? It would be a very long day at work, wouldn't it. Indeed, I do not think it could be done.

Now a question you might have asked is: 'If Jesus' dad is so powerful, why didn't he stop them?' But can you see how even though Jesus suffered at the time, we remember at Easter – because his Father was so powerful – in a way, he did stop them. Remember what they were trying to do? Trying to keep Jesus quiet and keep their lives the way they had always been – selfish, and having power over others. And what happened? Thousands and millions now speak with the voice of Jesus. His Father's power has raised him from death to life. And people who were alive at the time even saw Jesus after he was dead, walking round, talking and eating.

What I am trying to say William, is they couldn't have killed Jesus dad, because of the power he has – indeed it might be better to call him God at his point, because the power is so great that neither dad nor mum does this God justice.

What is more, this God has raised Jesus from the dead and given all those who follow him a share in that power to have life forever. Pretty tricky. Pretty mysterious. But ask me that question again another day and I will see if I can add or subtract from my answer.

April 10, 2020

In your final question, you ask: What's the story with the Easter Bunny? Why a bunny for Easter?

A shorter answer this time to finish. Can you remember how, previously, I suggested when we imagine things, especially mysterious things, we have to use images? Well, I think the Easter Bunny is one example of this.

Round about where you live (Sweden in the northern hemisphere) about this time of year, things start to get lighter, brighter, and warmer. Have you noticed that yet? For thousands of years, people relied on the change of season, when plants would blossom before coming into fruit, when animals would come out to feed on the new grasses and

plants that sprung up with the warmer weather. This was a life-giving, life-sustaining time of year. Things were changing about them.

They used to have parties to celebrate the end of the cold, and often harsh, winters, and show appreciation for the coming spring. I am sure they would have seen more bunnies at this time, and what is more, bunnies have very large families which grow quickly. They are an excellent image for newness of life and abundance (lots and lots). The bunnies, themselves, were not responsible for the change of season, but they were an image – for what must have seemed mysterious.

People who follow Jesus, because of what he said (why people feared him, remember he said change in the way we live was necessary), and because his Father raised him from the dead – bringing a whole new way of living into being, sat down and thought ... when might be a good time to remember and celebrate The Father's faithfulness and generosity? When might be a good time to remember that the old ways of living (not loving one another) has passed away, and a new changed way of being – new life has come into being with the death and resurrection of Jesus? And they said, how about the festival of spring – which people have used slightly less than perfect images to imagine for many, many years. I think that is where the Easter Bunny comes into Easter. I think that is where the word Easter comes into Easter. I think that is definitely the reason we have eggs at Easter.

So dear William, I hope some of what I have offered is of help to you, less still a hindrance. Keep asking these questions. Like I said from the outset, they are very good questions indeed.

Do pass on my very best regards and wishes of health and happiness to your sister, mother, and father. May God, in whose love everything is changed for the good, who has raised Jesus Christ and with him all who believe and follow, to new life, be with us all this Easter and evermore.

Affectionately yours,
Cameron