



The Good Friday disconnect

If you're in the church, there are times when you're definitely at the centre of life in the community. I think here of weddings and funerals, but also festival days, when people come to church and especially Christmas.

People flood into church at Christmas and even outside the church, there are so many signs of Christianity: cribs, Advent calendars, carols on the radio... it really feels like you're part of what everyone is doing.

It's not like that at Easter, especially on Good Friday.

I was talking with George, the nice guy who runs *The Pickled Pantry* last year, and he said that Good Friday was his busiest day of the year, in terms of takings.

That's great for him, and I've nothing against bacon sandwiches, cakes and cappuccinos, but it got me thinking. Basically, his Good Friday is the total opposite of mine.

Good Friday for me is about stillness and solemnity. We hold our children's service at 10am (at St Andrew's) and then switch up the road to St Mark's at midday for two hours of silence when the church is open for quiet prayer, followed by the liturgy of Good Friday when people come forward to venerate the Cross.

It's an incredibly solemn service; the church is stripped bare, the last sacrament is consumed, the service ends in silence at 3pm as I knock down the empty chalice. This is the moment on a Friday after-

noon 2,000 or so years ago, when Jesus died. The choir sing beautifully, but all in lament.

And it's not that *nobody* comes: many do. But it's miles away from Christmas when we're bursting at the seams. And outside, life goes cheerily on. This is not just any bank holiday; it's the one double bank holiday of the year, the beginning of a four day weekend. It's a great time for parties, friends, sporting spectacles, or—if you've a mind to it—you head down to B&Q and you embark on a long weekend's efforts at laying out decking in the garden, or putting together a bookcase.

I've heard tales of what life is like in fervently believing Catholic countries: one friend from the Philippines says that no one even smiles in public on Good Friday, let alone lets their hair down.

In England, just now, being a Christian, who—you know—goes to church to mark the central event in salvation history, is a rarity. The shame of it is that Good Friday is what lends Easter Day its true meaning. It's a shallow Easter celebrating the risen Jesus when you haven't marked his death.

For most people, I suspect it's not an active rejection of Jesus Christ on the cross; it's more a disconnect. It's as if the Church is telling a story in Greek and everyone around is speaking English. But for now it's one of those times when I'll keep plugging on, telling the Christian story, and one day, the language may become clearer.

April 2017. Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. www.surbitonchurch.org.uk. You can find this online at <http://surbitonchurch.org.uk/category/thought-for-the-train/>