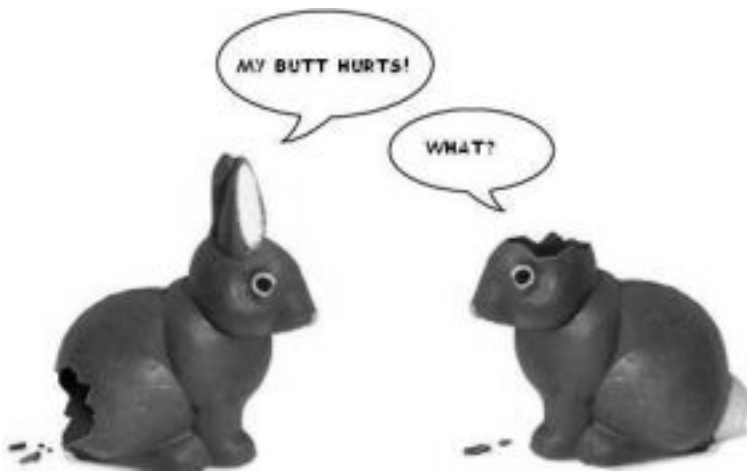


Which one's Easter?



Well, which one did you pick?

The Christian interpretation of Christmas may now be almost forgotten by the majority of our friends and family, despite the appeal of babies and gifts, but when it comes to Easter, they lost the plot a long time ago.

Part of the problem is that the name we use for this Christian festival, in common with Germans and other English-speaking countries, is the wrong word. Easter is the festival of the Anglo-Saxon goddess, Eostre. The Venerable Bede (672-735) writes that her cultus in England had died out by the 7th century. In other countries, the festival is called La Paque (France) Paschale (Latin) Pasqua (Spain) Paaske (Denmark) – all names deriving from the Hebrew word for Passover, and what much more sensible words to describe the festival they are!

So, in England, we start with a massive stumbling block in that our major Festival of Christ is named after an Anglo-Saxon goddess. It is a serious mistake. Add to that several other features, e.g. the secularisation of our lives generally, the commercialisation of all festivals by card manufacturers and gift sellers, the tendency to trivialise major issues via such things as bunnies and eggs, and not forgetting that the festival is very challenging intellectually and emotionally- and you have the ingredients for a major mess.

The four great days of Holy Week are Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day itself. At Holy Cross, the attendance at the mid-week services tends to be lower than on Sundays, but for the past few years, it is particularly noticeable that on Good Friday, there is a huge opting out of the worship planned for the day at 3pm. I can see why. It is an odd time of day to go to the church. The content of the service is challenging and the theme is disturbing, concerning suffering and death. It is difficult for adults, let alone children. Someone once remarked how



Crucifixion by Pablo Picasso (1930)

different the worship is on this day, once a year, and I would have to agree. The reason for the difference is that on Good Friday we are exposing ourselves to the passion narrative and focussing on this aspect. Death on a cross isn't glamorous or cute, or pretty, or pleasant. However there are two things to say. First, the death of Jesus is a matter at the heart of Christian faith and without it, we have nothing. It seems quite important to be part of the church's active worship that day. Secondly, we do not, at Holy Cross, wallow in the blood and gore. The important thing is not the details of what was done but who it was dying on the cross. Our worship never attempts to over-state the suffering and describe it in ways which make people wince, as critics said of Mell

Gibson's famous film about Jesus. We hear the story as written in the Gospels and respond to it in faith through our lives. There is nothing blood-thirsty, nothing to shock you, designed to solicit your sympathy and engage you at an inappropriate emotional level.

I would like to challenge members of the congregation to organise themselves to be at the Good Friday service and make the most of a fine opportunity to reflect on our faith.

Neil Richardson