



## **Procession and Service of Witness, Good Friday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

Our speaker was Revd Canon Andy Griffiths, coordinator of Curate Training and adviser on Continuing Ministerial Development for Chelmsford Diocese.

Here is the message he brought.

### **GOOD FRIDAY, GREAT NEWS**

1 Thessalonians 5.9-11, 15-16

We got a call one Thursday in August last year. A refugee family were arriving from Afghanistan the following Tuesday. We called an estate agent: yes, there was a house available; we could have the keys on Monday morning. We called Skylark church: yes, some church members had given some furniture.

So I put a call out for a flash mob on Facebook, and on the Monday 7 of us, from 4 different Chelmsford churches, washed the walls of the house, bought some halal food to put in the freezer, did some basic decoration, moved in some furniture and built some beds from scratch. On the Tuesday a staff member from Essex Integration drove to the airport and picked up the family, gave them their keys, and said “welcome to your new home”.

Why do Christians do this stuff? I don’t mean why do people in general do good things – lots of people do lots of good things all the time, and Christians definitely don’t have a monopoly on goodness. But when Christians do good things, why do they do them?

Take food banks, for example. Carol and Paddy Henderson founded the Trussell Trust in 1997 to improve conditions for children sleeping in Railway Stations in Bulgaria. Then in 2000, Paddy received a call from a mother in Salisbury saying: “My children are going to bed hungry tonight – what are you going to do about it?” So Paddy started Salisbury Foodbank in his garden shed and garage. The model has spread across the country, and here in Chelmsford 3500 people a year are fed by Chelmsford Foodbank, which is led by Oasis Church.

Back to my question: why do Christians do this stuff? It’s not because we’re better than

anyone else. It's not because we think God can't stand us, and the only way we can make him smile is to do good. No – God's already chosen not to pour out his anger on us, he already chose to rescue us. It's not because we think if we do good things we'll get to heaven – we're confident that's already sorted, finished and completed at the cross. Like it says in the Bible passage the Mayor just read, "Christ died for us, so we will certainly live with him forever". Guaranteed.

So I ask one more time: why do Christians do good stuff? It's because we're grateful. Powerfully, cheerfully, life-changingly, unashamedly, unembarrassedly grateful. We've had some great news, and the news is that when Jesus died he took on himself all our failures and all our pain and all our brokenness and all our evil and all our shame and all our rubbish, he soaked it up like a sponge and he died to get rid of it and give us forgiveness and freedom. This Good Friday news is SO great that it fills us with joyful confident gratitude. And of course in two days we'll have even more great news, the news that God has raised Jesus from the dead as proof that what he did on the cross was effective, so we can have a new life and a new heart and a new purpose.

Christians do good things because our gratitude for the great news of Good Friday spills out in prayer and joy and encouragement and irrationally forgiving people and extravagant generosity and food banks and doing up houses for refugees. You may say to me: Andy, I know some Christians who aren't very joyful or forgiving or extravagantly generous. Well, I say to you: imagine how miserable and mean and vengeful they'd be if they weren't Christians, because being a Christian is the most life-changingly joyful thing that could happen to anyone! Christianity is not mostly a set of rules or a new routine, it's mostly an encounter with Jesus who erupts into our life with the joy of gratitude for great news. If it was bad news, we'd call it Bad Friday. If it was medium news, we'd call it Pretty Much Satisfactory Friday, Steady as You Go Friday, Don't Get Too Enthusiastic Friday. But it's such great news, we call it Good Friday.