



'The Return of the Alleluia'

I had not heard about the tradition of 'burying the Alleluia', before Revd Angela Nicoll told me about it a few weeks ago.....

Throughout the liturgical year, the Christian Church makes certain changes to reflect the liturgical season. For example, there are no flowers in church in Lent. The church is also traditionally 'stripped back' of all adornments on Maundy Thursday, as we make the last part of the journey with Jesus through recalling his Passion, his death and separation.

But then on Easter Eve, the church is decorated, or 'dressed' once again with flowers and the ornaments are returned. The colour changes from the reflective purple of Lent to the white or gold for Easter, to celebrate our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

There is also a long-standing tradition for suspending the use of declaring "Alleluia!", from Shrove Tuesday, the day before the beginning of the Lenten fast on Ash Wednesday until Easter Eve.

The meaning of "Alleluia" comes to us from Hebrew— *Hallelujah* and it means "praise Yahweh." It is a term of great joy.

The readings in Lent focus heavily on the spiritual journey of Old Testament Israel toward the coming of Christ, and the salvation of mankind in His death and resurrection.

I understand now how the traditional practice of ‘burying the Alleluia’ enriches and shapes prayer and the sense of discipline, anticipating Easter. The word ‘Alleluia’ may be buried under stones in a prayer corner until Easter, when the Alleluia may then be brought out with any other decorations and the singing of: “Alleluia!” in joyful praise. There is an end to the abstinence of fasting and restraint. The “Alleluia” no longer lies dormant. Now it is time for it to be sung with a burst of joyful affirmation, celebrating the Resurrection.

Symbolism is part of the rich colour of church life. We know that the stories in church stained glass windows assisted people in their understanding, when maybe they had not had the opportunity to learn to read and write.

When we’ve travelled to other countries, we may have visited churches and cathedrals where we do not know the language or the culture. However, the images we see cut across all of that, because we can understand the stories and the symbolism depicted by the windows, pictures, icons and sculptures.

God’s language is one of love. It needs no interpretation. Irrespective of our backgrounds, it is the same language for us all. This has become more and more apparent to us during this worldwide pandemic. We have missed so much its symbolism, which is common to us all and doesn’t need words. It is the loving embrace and firm handshake. It is the arm of support. It is the meeting of eyes and the whole of the face uncovered before each other and before God, as we gather together to worship and to pray.

We keep safe, we keep faith, we keep hopeful. We trust in the God who died, was buried and rose again. He is with us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let’s keep his hand in ours, in thanks and praise. **Alleluia!**

