

# Easter faith



For a number of years, I served as the Special Needs Governor of a large secondary school. The school served a number of large housing estates with significant pockets of deprivation resulting in an above-average intake of students facing particular challenges on a number of fronts.

I can still remember one particular visit when I was asked to go and see a PE lesson taking place. Thirty fifteen-year-old boys were all lined up in two rows. One row was composed of quiet, studious-looking types who wanted to please and get on with the lesson. The other row was made up of boys who were laughing and joking, making it clear that they did not want to be there and longing for the day when formal education would be behind them. The PE teacher had his hands full trying to enthuse the whole class with the idea of cross-country running and keeping fit as part of a healthy lifestyle. The Vicar's presence didn't make life any easier for him when it came to containing adolescent subversive behaviour. I was on the point of leaving, thinking this would be the most helpful thing that I could do when the Head teacher appeared.

The Head teacher ruled the school with an iron rod and a jolly sense of humour, much respected by staff and students alike. Silence fell upon the PE group.

Order was quickly restored as one teacher quietly acknowledged the Head's support. The Head turned to me and said, "I'm not worried about the boys who are larking about. They are learning an important life skill, how to get by with charm and humour. Most of them will be fine. They have the gift of the gab. It's the other lot, the academic types I worry about. Will they survive the system?" And then he said something I have never ever forgotten. "Always expect to be surprised by a child. Just when you think you've got them all worked out – they surprise you!"

Gerard Hughes, a Jesuit, and writer on spirituality published a book in the late 1980s titled *God of Surprises*. It sold widely and is now recognised as a spiritual classic. Hughes, who struggled with depression, writes of his learning to encounter God in the everyday. It is a God of surprises who breaks through the gloom and chaos of a dysfunctional world, bringing relief and a new sense of purpose and life just when you think all is lost.

Easter celebrates this God of Surprises. The crucified Jesus walks out of the tomb of death, to embrace the world with a universal love that transforms and rekindles the broken. Faith is the surprising gift of God to those with the courage to seek food for the soul in the day-to-day. New life emerges often from quite unexpected quarters.

In the words of my Head teacher friend, 'Always expect to be surprised by a child.' And in the words of Gerard Hughes, 'Always expect to be surprised by faith in God.'

*Happy Easter*

*God Bless*

*Revd Mark Bailey*