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Dear friends,

Chocolate rabbits in the shops, cute little fluffy chicks, extortionately priced calorie filled chocolate eggs, why it must be Easter! Of course it has felt like Easter for some time, with these items in display in the shops since at least mid February. In a society that has forgotten anticipation and always wants instant gratification, everything always appears in the shops before the event. So we no longer have a period of Advent in order to be ready for Christmas, and we no longer see the need for Lent in order to be ready for Easter. We also feel that these two major seasons are over once the day is done. For the Church the Christmas season lasts until Epiphany on 6th of January. The season of Easter last until Ascension Day, which this year is on 17th of May. That means that we have six Sundays during the season of Easter. I suspect the chocolate confectionaries will be half price well before we have reached that date. The question for us all is, will our enthusiasm for the significance of Easter last that long, even if it exists at all?

Some years ago an elderly lady commented to me that she really hated Easter. She thought the Good Friday services were morbid and horrible and the Easter Day services pointless. Well at least she had attended! I know that her dislike of the Good Friday services were all bound up with the fact that she, like so many people, had real problems with anything related to death. She simply did not want anything that reminded her of the suffering and death of Jesus. Yet as far as the Christian narrative is concerned, the account of God's desire to save humanity from its inherent propensity to sinfulness, Good Friday is absolutely crucial. We need to know and acknowledge that Jesus was prepared to suffer the most painful and humiliating death for each of us. My doctrine lecturer used to say that the strength of the Christian message is that if you were the only person that had ever lived, Jesus would have been prepared to die just for

you. That is an extra-ordinary statement and one worth pondering. God loves each of us that much.

But of course Good Friday is not the end of the story. Good Friday leads inevitably to the extra-ordinary reality of Easter Day. One year, after I have retired (many years from now) I would love to be part of the celebrations in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The church, shared by many denominations, is a chaotic place at the best of times. At midnight coming into Easter Morning it breaks into complete pandemonium. A fire is lit signalling the resurrection and then passed around the worshippers. Thanks to the internet you can see it. The chaos is also very high energy, signally that something totally extra-ordinary has happened. Of course it is unbelievable that Jesus rose from the dead. That is the whole point! It is amazing and all services on that day should try and capture that sense that the impossible has happened. An impossible event that means, amongst many other things, that we can also over-come death. For the Christian death is not to be feared. We know it will happen to us all anyway. As Woody Allen said, "there are only two certainties in life – death and taxes".

It was fantastic to see so many people in the churches over the period of Christmas. It used to be that people thought themselves a church-goer if they went to two services a year, at Christmas and Easter. Now many people have lost the second one! Would it not be wonderful to recapture the importance and significance of Easter? We have many powerful worship opportunities. This year I have itemised them elsewhere, as I know there are many new people to church. It would be wonderful to see people join our joint walk of witness on Good Friday. Meeting at the Catholic Church for around 12.30, the powerful walk with the cross along the High Street is a moving experience. Easter morning services, where we bring to our consciousness that God has achieved the impossible just for us. I do hope that you will make an effort celebrate what Jesus has done for you.

Happy Easter season, *Patrick*.