



Reflection: Seeing Easter through fresh eyes

By Lorna Ferguson

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:17b-19)

Last Sunday, we held an Easter outreach event for children here in Sakata. Thirteen children came along, with seven parents—most of whom are not Christians. I gave a short message, as well as helping organise some games. This coming Sunday, we are planning a “Welcome Service” for Easter, and I have been asked to share a short testimony about Easter in a way that any visitors will be able to understand. As I have been preparing both of these, I have been struck by the challenge of explaining the message of the cross and resurrection to people here whose worldview is very different and who have no church background and little, if any, knowledge of Jesus.

In Japan, Easter is still largely unknown. It is not marked in the calendar, there are no public holidays, and there is little sign of it in the shops. I did come across one display—plastic eggs, bunny ornaments, even duck-shaped marshmallows—but by last week even those had disappeared. Yet it is not only the customs that are unfamiliar. The central concepts—sin and grace, the crucifixion and resurrection—are also largely unknown in Japan. So where do you begin?

Since Christianity is viewed as a foreign religion, I find it helpful to look for examples from Japanese history or culture that might help provide a point of connection. One such example is Jo Nijjima. In 1864, at a time when it was illegal to leave Japan, he secretly travelled to the United States. There he became a Christian, returning to Japan in 1874, shortly after the 259-year ban on Christianity had been lifted. Despite significant opposition, he founded the Doshisha English Academy the following year. He based the school on Christian principles but was forbidden to teach the Bible there. Instead, he taught it in his home initially.

In 1880, a dispute arose between some students and the school, and some of the students went on strike—an act of disobedience that called for discipline. At a morning worship, Principal Nijjima announced to the students that their absence had been a violation of school regulations but insisted that the blame did not lie with them. Rather, as principal, he was the one to be blamed. “Therefore,” he said, “I must punish the principal.” He then took his cane and struck his own left hand so hard that the cane broke in two. The students were shocked as they watched the principal take the punishment that should have been theirs.

I find this story quite moving as I picture what happened in the school that morning. I felt something similar when I first encountered the scene in C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, where Aslan is killed on the stone table in place of Edmund while his sisters watch in horror from a





distance. There is something very poignant about stories like these – when an innocent person takes a punishment for someone else.

When Japanese people come to understand what Jesus did for them on the cross, it is often with a real sense of wonder that Jesus would love them enough to die for them. It is so new for them, and so much greater than any human or fictional comparison. At baptisms, they often give their testimony through tears.

I wonder, are we still moved in the same way by the story of Jesus dying for us on the cross, by how amazing it is that Jesus would take our punishment? Or is it possible that familiarity with the story can sometimes rob us of our wonder? Paul Tripp wrote the following about the dangers of becoming too familiar with a story in *Come, Let Us Adore Him*. It's a daily advent devotional, but I think it is just as applicable to the Easter story:

“But familiarity often does bad things to us. Often when we become familiar with things, we begin to take them for granted... When we are familiar with things, we tend not to celebrate them as we once did. Familiarity tends to rob us of our wonder.”

Although challenging, it is a huge privilege to have the opportunity to share the Easter message with people who may never have heard “how wide and long and high and deep” Christ’s love is, or that Jesus died in their place. As I try to see the story through their eyes, I find myself freshly struck by its wonder. Perhaps that is something we all need—to see afresh what we know so well. As we approach Easter and take time to remember all that Jesus did for us on the cross, may each one of us have a fresh sense of wonder and gratitude.

Easter at Holyrood

Here are details of the events planned over the Easter weekend and please be praying for –

- **Encounters with Jesus** on Thursday 2nd April at 7.30pm. Emma, Christy, Josh and Ali will share their testimonies and there will be Easter treats.
- **Good Friday Service** at 7.30pm
- **Family Easter Egg Hunt** on Saturday 4th April from 10am to 12 noon over in the park. There will be hot cross buns and refreshments served in the church.
- **Easter Sunday Services** at 10.30am and 6pm.

Flyers are available in the foyer to pass to family and friends.





Easter Holidays

Liz (our administrator) is on annual leave from Monday 6th April until Friday 18th April. Joe and the family are away on holiday from Thursday 9th April until Tuesday 21st April. For any urgent matters in their absence, please contact one of the elders.

We are very thankful to Jon Gemmell for taking our morning and evening services on Sunday 12th April and to Neil Longwe and Josh Strike preaching on Sunday 19th April.

Holyrood Women's Conference – 2nd May



Save the date! We are looking forward to having a women's conference on **Saturday 2nd May** from 10am to 1pm.

Anne MacDonald (Bon Accord Free Church in Aberdeen) will be speaking on Idols of Our Hearts. We'll have a couple of seminar options – one will be a Bible overview with Anne and the other will be looking at self-sacrificial discipleship and evangelism with Naomi Amour. It promises to be a great morning of teaching and fellowship together.

Please go here for more details and to sign up <https://www.ticket-tailor.com/events/holyroodevangelicalchurch/2138875> We'll open the day up to women from other churches and please invite friends along. Contact Liz@holyroodchurch.org if you have any questions.

Evening Service Livestream

Just a reminder that the elders have decided to stop the livestream of the Sunday evening service after the Easter weekend. The livestream of the morning service will continue as usual and the sermon from the evening service will still be recorded and posted online later on in the week. If you have any questions, please speak to Joe or one of the elders.

Youth Connect Event – Saturday 18th April



We are hosting a Youth Connect Event on **Saturday 18th April** from 6.30pm - 9pm with Word of Life UK. The plan is to gather teenagers and young people from across Edinburgh and East Lothian for a simple programme with games, songs, and time in God's Word. It's free and open to all 13-18 year olds.





Act Like Men – Wednesday 22nd April

Join us at Hope Church Bingham for an evening men's conference to encourage each other to live for King Jesus in Edinburgh and beyond. This year our Act Like Men evening conferences will focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Come along on **22nd April** from 7:00–8:30pm. Pete Stewart (Hope Community Church Balanark) will help us consider The Death of Christ and why it matters for our lives and the communities God has placed us in. To reserve a spot, go [here](#).

Church Calendar

This week for your info and prayers:

- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting at 7pm (with refreshments from 6.45pm). There is also an online option and contact Liz@holyroodchurch.org for more details.
- Thursday: Encounters with Jesus at 7.30pm
- Friday: Good Friday Service at 7.30pm
- Saturday: Family Easter Egg Hunt from 10am-12 noon.

Week beginning Sunday 5th

- Easter Sunday:
 - Communion Service at 10.30am – Joe Barnard preaching (live streamed)
 - Evening Service at 6pm – Joe Barnard preaching (live streamed)
- Wednesday: Home groups across the city

Week beginning Sunday 12th

- Sunday:
 - Worship Service at 10.30am – Jon Gemmell preaching (live streamed)
 - Evening Service at 6pm – Jon Gemmell preaching
- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting at 7pm (with an online option)
- Saturday: Youth Connect Event from 6.30pm – 9pm

Week beginning Sunday 19th

- Sunday:
 - Worship Service at 10.30am – Neil Longwe preaching (live streamed)
 - Evening Service at 6pm – Josh Strike preaching
- Wednesday: Home Group across the city
- Thursday: Session meeting at 7pm
- Friday: Holyrood Youth (with Josh Strike) 7-9pm

