

Everything's different this year. Easter that is. Normally Holy Week is about preparing and going to services, making sure the plans for the weekend are in place, enjoying the fact that it's Spring. Usually it's difficult to feel the solemnity of Holy Week, simply because it is Spring, we're about to have a long weekend – and well, we know the end of the story. You don't feel so sad about those events when you know that the Resurrection has happened.

But this year everything's different. This year we stopped and listened. And noticed. It's still Spring – gloriously so. But those small things matter so much more now. That otter I saw on the bridge the other day – the heron flying over – that yellow butterfly I keep seeing... were they all there in Holy Week last year? They must have been, but I didn't stop and notice. This year I'm not allowed to go anywhere, so I stand still where I am and listen. Are the birds louder this Spring?

This year everything's different. The sadness of Holy Week is staring each of us in the face as the whole world comes to terms with the reality of suffering and death. While the sun still shines, sorrow and fear come into focus. We may know what happens in the Easter story, but apart from the messages of hope that this time will come to an end, we don't know how or when it will end and at what cost.

This year we're seeing things differently. We don't have the extravagant Easter Egg tied up with ribbon, the meal out with friends and family, or the Church full of joyful singing. We would love to enjoy those things, but this year we have come to appreciate simple things – the sun, the birdsong, the blossom; those things which have been hidden before – the kindness of strangers, gratitude and sacrifice. We see hope as well as despair.

This year is different. We stand still and listen. We are quiet and we notice. We are thankful. We who feel sadness and loneliness take comfort in the message of hope brought by the familiar Easter story. We may not know how our story continues, but our God who brought hope and new life to the world after a long week of fear brings us hope, new life and comfort. Just as we see the simple things and are amazed by them as if for the first time, so we continue to be amazed by the resurrection power of Jesus working in each of us.

Next year will be different.