

Playing Games with Easter

They say that you can tell a lot about a person by the games that he plays - and I am thinking of board games and the like, rather than rugby or cricket. Armed with that thought, it seemed to me that you can approach the Easter story with the mentality which lies behind these various games. I have just selected five to get us thinking this Easter.

One of the most popular games around the world is **Monopoly**. Here is a game which is about money and power. It is fairly ruthless, and whilst it has much in common with that saying of Jesus "the person who has something will be given more, and the person who has nothing will have taken away from him even the little he has", in some ways it is a profoundly un-Christian game. However, since it is about power, maybe this approach has something to say about Easter. The story of Good Friday is about evil having its day. The hatred which led to Jesus' death is a triumph of evil over good. The Devil appears to hold lots of properties, and is building on them fast. But then Easter suddenly reverses all that - maybe the effect of a Chance Card about Building Repairs. And the power of God is seen to defeat even that massive accumulation of power against him. Monopoly talks in money terms, and some of the earliest Christians put the events of Easter into financial terms - talking of Jesus' death as a ransom. That is a confusing bit of language, because carried too far, it seems as if God was paying the Devil off. But at its intended, basic level, it is a powerful picture - there was no price which was too great for God to pay to show us his love. The cost of God's love is seen in the cross. And by that cost God wins all the power, and we can see today as affirming that God has **all** the cards.

Probably the oldest commonly played game is **Chess**. Here is a game of immense skill, which requires careful thought and strategic planning. It has its origins in the idea of battles - it is the archetypal war-game, I suppose. It involves sacrifice, and it ends with the death of the opposing King. Here again, it is easy to see the Chess-player's approach to Easter. You think of Jesus' own approach as he faced Jerusalem, as John reports it: "No-one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will. "I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back again.

There could be no victory without sacrifice. Whether we are right to think of God indulging in strategic planning, I am not so sure. But the chess-player, who knows that to win, he must be prepared to think ahead, and to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to achieve his goal - he has an insight into what was happening on Good Friday and Easter Day. On Friday we remembered the sacrifice, and today we rejoice that because of that sacrifice, our King is triumphant, and the enemy is defeated. Checkmate!

How about **Cluedo**? Here the object is to find out "Whodunit?", and with what weapon and where. That has long been an approach to Easter. As far as the death of Jesus is concerned, the blame has been laid at the feet of all sorts of people. Tragically, it was at root of much anti-Jewish feeling in former times, as if the entire race for the whole of history had to take responsibility for the actions of a handful in 1st

century Jerusalem. Pilate has been blamed, for being weak-minded. Some indeed have blamed Jesus himself, for not understanding the implications of what he said and did. But if Jesus said anything remotely like that quotation from St John I read just now, that would seem most inappropriate. But you can understand the need to find someone to blame. The piety of believers, in hymns and liturgy, has brought it back to us - and we sing things like:

Who was the guilty? who brought this upon thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee.
I crucified thee.

And so too with the resurrection: people have investigated long and hard into what happened, and who did what. New books on exactly these lines come out with incredible regularity. The Cluedo mind wants to know who and what and how. And whilst those answers cannot be the full story, they can be had, to some extent, and serve to bolster faith, and to challenge those who dismiss the whole idea of the resurrection. It cannot be ultimately and finally proved, but then neither can it be ultimately and finally disproved either.

My fourth approach is that of the person who loves **Trivial Pursuit**. It depends on some degree of knowledge, and a certain amount of luck, and for it to be fun, a great ability to laugh. There seems to be in us a love of knowing things, of being able to answer the questions. And that provides another aspect of Easter. There are imponderable questions, which people have asked in every age and every culture. One is about the evil around us - why are things as bad as they are? Alan Dale brilliantly paraphrased some words from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians like this:

If Jesus is dead, and has not been raised to life again, all we've lived for as friends of Jesus is just an empty dream, and we're just where we were, helpless to do anything about the evil in our hearts and in the world.

The story of Jesus' death and resurrection provides a way of finding some answers to those questions. Another universal question is about the nature of life and death. Is this all there is to it? Is there something else to come? Again, Paul writing to the Corinthians has no doubt that it is in the story of Easter that we have the way of answering those questions. Jesus is like the first fruit that ripens on the tree - the rest (including ourselves) will follow. The Trivial Pursuit mind, that always wants answers, can use the Easter story to find some. And as in the game, if you get an answer, it is not usually an end in itself, but it enables you to go on to the next question.

My last game is not on a board, but also has something important to say about Easter - and that is a **Rubik's Cube**. I was amazed when these things came out at how people could solve the puzzle in seconds. I find it impossible to solve, except with careful reading of a book I have which tells you how to do it. It seems so easy, but actually is so difficult.

When you get one bit right, you seem always to have made something else worse. It really is

mysterious. And that is an aspect of Easter we have to hold onto. We can just see it in terms of power, like the Monopoly mind, or strategic battles, like the Chess mind. It isn't just a Whodunit, as the Cluedo mind thinks, or just an answer to some questions, as the Trivial Pursuit fanatic might want. It is all those things, and yet it is still, like the Rubik Cube, a puzzle, a mystery. But it is true. And in the story of Jesus rising, we see how God can put everything right, like someone getting the six sides of the cube into their proper sequence. It tells us that everything is possible to God, however impossible it may seem to us. And that when God puts things right, then they are as they should be. That is the Easter hope, as well as the Easter message, for Easter is still happening, and we have a part to play in making the hope a present reality. So although games may show us aspects of what Easter is about, we have to go on from playing games to make that vision real, in our lives, and the life of the world around, to be the Easter People.