

WEEKLY SERMON

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Talk to young people about the glorious message of Easter

There are currently lots of teachers looking forward to a well-earned break, and thousands of children and young people enjoying the beginning of spring. But in my household, some of the holidays will be spent studying and beginning to feel the stress of preparing for exams.

To some extent exams are a rite of passage. Whilst they're points of stress, worry, and nervousness that have to be endured, they do come to an end and open up into another stage of life. But these times can be pinch-points for our teenagers who are already feeling stress, unhappiness and dissatisfaction with their lives, health, friendships, image and the hope they have for the future.

Many of our young people feel connected yet isolated, savvy but anxious, indulged yet stressed. Information from Childline reports that nearly a third of calls are concerned with mental health issues; 20% of girls admit to self-harming, and nearly 40% reported feeling unhappy or worthless. All across Lancashire young people are seeking treatment for low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and self-harm, in greater proportions than any other generation on record.

I recently watched 'The Greatest Showman'. This has a song called 'This is Me' that has a fantastic and energising message. But at its core, it's a powerful message from the young that life can feel like a battle, with bullets and barricades. There are children and young people who we know – perhaps even our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews who today feel that they've learned to be ashamed of all their scars, and to "run away coz no-one will love you as you are".

All this screams out that the answer to the battles they face is a deep, sustained and firm faith in Jesus Christ. More than ever we need to remember and re-learn how to love our children and young people, to encourage them to feel free and safe to grow as children of God, and to allow them to flourish and live life in all its fullness.

Our young people are interested in the glorious authentic message of Easter; that they are loved as sons and daughters of the eternal, live-giving, life-fulfilling God, who treasures them. So this Easter, talk about Jesus, his teachings and his life, his death and resurrection. Show how God has transformed lives in the past and is transforming lives today. Show grace; exhibit forgiveness; demonstrate hope; and like Jesus, love as though life depends on it.

Sam Johnson
Board of Education