

Easter Day – 9th April

Acts 10:34-43

Colossian 3:1-4

John 20:1-18

A couple of weeks back we were in the middle of the six nations rugby competition. And for a couple of the games we were busy in the afternoons so decided to record the matches to watch later. But I had to send messages to a number of people to ensure they didn't tell us the result before we had seen the game.

Because when you know the outcome, when you know what's going to happen, watching a game is never the same. The not knowing is all important

Its true with books too, though I have to admit I recently purchased a book from the Friends book sale and it was only after I got through the first chapter that I realised I had read it before.

The Easter morning gospel reading – the one we just heard about Mary Magdalene going to the tomb – is one of the most dramatic stories in the Bible. The trouble is we know the story so well and of course we know the ending; we know that after finding the tomb empty, in her confusion and bewilderment Mary will meet the risen Jesus after mistaking him for the gardener.

But try for a moment to put yourself in Mary's shoes. What was it like that morning for her?

For Mary I suppose it was a bit like a thriller on TV, but more so. Like a mystery unfolding before her eyes. She had no idea of what was coming next, no indication of where the next turn would be or where it would all finish.

But for us, we cannot 'unknow' what we know.

So this morning lets imagine. Perhaps close your eyes and let you imagination run lose ..

Imagine it's early on Sunday morning. The long Sabbath is over; the horrors of Friday are past – the arrest, the trial, the beatings, the crucifixion - but the sights and sounds still echo around your mind. You can't believe it's all over. Jesus, dear Jesus, the one who promised so much; the one whose words and actions spoke of a God who loves us and is interested in us. The one But now of course he is dead. Its all over

And on Friday – oh Friday as the sabbath approached - there just wasn't the time to anoint his body as you wanted to. You have waited through the seemingly never ending Sabbath to do this last thing for him. This last act of love that you can show. And now the dawn is breaking. Light is appearing and the time has come.

And so you walk to the tomb. You know the place where he was laid. Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. On the way there you think about Jesus; about how he had made you feel; about the freedom he gave you, about the hope that he brought; and of course about the devastation that came on Friday. But curiously you don't have a thought about that huge stone that you had seen rolled over the tomb entrance, or how you are going to move it to get inside the tomb and anoint the body.

And then as you arrive you see the stone isn't there. The tomb is wide open. Suddenly your mood changes from the thoughts you were having about Jesus to fear. What has happened? Is it the Romans? Is it the Jewish leaders? Are they here somewhere looking out for you?

And so you turn and run. As fast as you can. Run back to Peter and the others. Peter – the rock Jesus called him – and even though he hadn't been very rock like these last few days (but then none of us had been, had we) although he had messed things up, Peter would surely know what to do.

So you try to explain what you had seen, but it comes out as words that don't seem to fit together. You find yourself burbling. The body...the tomb....the stone.. I don't know... what shall we do?

And then Peter and John start running, and you try to keep up. You know where they are going and you put all your energies into trying to keep up but they are fit and can easily outrun you. You see John is the faster, and in the distance you can see he has got to the tomb. You see him look in and then stop; What has he seen? And then you see Peter get there and he goes straight in – typical Peter - acts before he thinks. And then you get there too, straining to breathe after the running. You look in ... you see the linen that had been wrapped around his body, folded; you see the cloth that had been wrapped around his head rolled up. But no sign of Jesus.

And John says quite slowly – this can only mean he has risen from the dead – like he did for Lazarus, like he said... .

But you're not sure. And Peter too looks uncertain. The three of you stand there. Staring. Silent. Wondering. And then you hear a sound in the distance, and it brings you all back to reality and the present. Peter says we could be in danger, The authorities will think we've done something. The soldiers who were guarding the tomb ... He leaves the statement unfinished. We know what he means. And so Peter and John leave – hurrying back to their secret hideaway. They assume that you are following them.

But you find you can't move. Something's making you stay. The tears are welling up. Could it be that John is right? It all seems so strange; beyond understanding. You look again into the tomb, and through the tears things look different. You see two men there – dressed in white – yet are they men? They are dazzling white; almost too bright to look at. And one says to you – Why are you crying?

Who are these strange beings – you have never seen anyone like this before . You find yourself saying through the tears and the confusion 'They've taken my Lord away – and I don't know where they have laid him!'

And then there's a noise behind you. Was Peter right about the authorities? Is that someone coming to get you?

You look, your eyes still tearful and almost blinded by the dazzling white of these strange beings. – it's a man on his own. He looks like a gardener you think. And he asks her that same question 'Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?'

You blurt out – if you know where they have taken him tell me!'

And then he speaks again, this time more gently. He calls your name . 'Mary'. And something about the way he says it, something about his eyes, something about the way he is standing looking deep into your eyes. The tears from your eyes are gradually drying, and now you see much more clearly. But it can't be . You saw him die. And yet it is. Standing there. You stare in awe and wonder and silence for what seems like an eternity. He is still looking right at you. You say that word you have said so many times before 'Rabboni!' and you rush forward to hug him.

But he says Don't! hold on to me! And then the clarity goes. It all gets mysterious again. ' He says 'I have to ascend to my Father. Go and tell my brothers!'

And you leave. You do as he says. Your mind is racing. Can this be true? Am I dreaming? You look back. He is still there watching you. Those eyes. The love in that face. This is no dream.

And then you find yourself back with the others and you try to explain what has happened. All you can say is "I have seen the Lord!'

But even if we enter into the story and imagine ourselves in Mary's situation; even if we walk with her to the tomb, and see with her the risen Jesus; even if we are alongside her as she encounters the unexpected and the unexplainable, the story can still remain for us just a story.

But surely the important and vital and life changing message of Easter is that this isn't just a story from 2000 years ago. It can be for us a present reality. As we

struggle to make sense of life – whatever the questions that trouble us, be they personal or global, be they ones of sorrow, worry or joy – the resurrection can be reality for us today as we encounter the risen Jesus in the midst of our struggles and challenges – it can be a reality of we look out for him.

In Mary's story she recognises Jesus when he calls her name – that familiar greeting – Mary ..

In the story of the Emmaus Road the two followers of Jesus recognise him when he breaks the bread – the familiar act they had seen many times before

In the story of Peter and John and the others fishing on the lake, they recognise Jesus when he asks them to do something he had asked before – the casting the net to catch a great haul of fish – the familiar call they had received before.

The temptation for us is to look for the risen Jesus in the profound, the unusual, the dramatic. But in each of these stories of encounters with the risen Jesus he was recognised in familiar words or actions.

In recent months – as this morning – we have begun to share some of those moments here in church. Those WOW moments where Jesus makes himself known to us often in the ordinariness of life - he makes himself known by words or action; perhaps through the words or actions of others

The important thing is for us to keep our eyes open, watching and waiting; alert – ready to see those glimpses of Jesus in our lives.

The risen Jesus who still today looks deep into our eyes and speaks to us by name. Paul. Margaret. Don, Linda

The risen Jesus who can still today surprise and change us, as he surprised and changed Mary 2000 years ago. The risen Jesus who can turn our lives around as we follow him; as we respond to the call he makes on our lives.

For Mary Jesus told her to tell the others and she did – the first person to proclaim the resurrection; for the pair on the Emmaus road they didn't have to be told – their response was so swift as they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others what they had seen; for Peter by the lake the call – three times – was to follow him and look after his other disciples which he did.

For us, for us this Easter –as we reflect on the story of the resurrection, can we hear Jesus calling us? And what is he calling us to?