

## Fr Tim's Sermon – Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024

### Easter Sunday

#### Readings:

**Acts 10: 34-43**

**John 20: 1-18**

It's really struck me over the last couple of weeks, how many people I've spoken to, at the school gates, on street corners, in local shops, and anywhere else I've found myself, who have commented that I'm coming up to my busy time!

Perhaps that's the conversation a twenty-first century vicar has. The community all know how busy Easter must be, but if we were to ask them why we've spent the last couple of weeks being so busy, what would they say?

How many of the community who have said this to me would be able to articulate the story of the death and passion, the darkness, and then the joy of the Resurrection.

Perhaps this is the world in which we now live. A world where people recognise that Easter is a busy time for the vicar, where people remember something about the crucifixion of Jesus, and know that Easter has something to do with this.

And of course, it does. The fact that the Crucifixion is actually the work of Good Friday, and that on Easter Sunday we gather to share in the joy of the Resurrection is utterly irrelevant to those who don't know. As far as many are concerned, Easter is about the Crucifixion of Jesus, and that's that.

You might be surprised by this, maybe even shocked, but this is the reality of the world. Confused, misunderstood, patchy memories, and half understood truths, and these make up the perception that exists all around us in the world. And then, there's us. We're different. We're faithful Christians. We're here, to listen to all that is said within this Mass, and to bear witness to the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and has come among us, historically as a man, and sacramentally as bread and wine on the Altar.

We can shout Alleluia as loudly as we like, because we've heard the truth, seen what a difference it makes, and we live in relationship with the risen Christ.

But what does it mean for us to live this life? What does it mean for us to be those who have come to know the truth? And what does it mean for our future, if we truly believe what we are here to celebrate this morning?

In our Gospel reading this morning, we have three other people who have gone through some difficult emotions, who have been challenged by some difficult questions, and who must be wondering what their future will hold. Three faithful friends, who come to see what is going on.

First, there is Mary Magdalene. She is first to the tomb, while it is still dark. She can't even wait until sunrise. Perhaps she couldn't sleep. Perhaps she was being eaten up inside with the memories, the darkness of the last few days. And she does the only thing she can do. She goes to the tomb.

But when she gets there, the stone has been rolled away. She panics. She runs to tell Peter and John. What can this mean? She needs someone by her side, to help her to find the courage as things get even darker. Peter and John then come running. Incidentally, there are more mentions of running in these verses than in the rest of the Gospels put together. This might seem like an aside, but in fact, it builds the tension. Everything is fast paced, happening quickly, and with the three people in the story, we are not left a lot of time to think.

So, the disciples come running, and the young John gets to the tomb first. He had a look, but even he wasn't brave enough to walk in. But then, the slightly older and slower Peter appears at his side, and perhaps very typically, he doesn't think twice, but rushes in to the tomb. And there the two of them stand. There is the reality in front of them. There are the linen wrappings, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head. But the one thing that was not there, was Jesus.

And, how bizarre. Having seen these things, they turned, and they returned to their homes. What was going through their minds, we may never know.

But for Mary Magdalene, things are a bit different. She is now alone again. She has been kept company, in the blur, in the stress, in the rush of the first moments, and now she has the opportunity to be quiet, and perhaps to be ready for what must come next. She takes another look. She's a bit braver now, and she peers into the darkness of the tomb. And there, there are the angels. Did she know they were angels? Did they have white wings and gold halos? I doubt it, but they clearly gave an impression of peace, as they asked her: Woman, why are you weeping?

For the first time, the desperation seems to set in. This time, she is not running. This time, she isn't looking for others to share her burden. This time, she answers the question – they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. It's been said, articulated for the first time. I have no idea what is going on. I'm lost. I'm broken. It's hopeless, and there's nothing I can do about it.

But, as she turns around, there is the man, the gardener, someone she can talk to. She lays all her hope on him, as she asks him, if you have carried him away, tell me where he is. All her trust, all her hope, all her future, lies with this one stranger in the garden. Tell me where you have laid him.

And of course, he says that one word, Mary. In an instant, everything changes. Her eyes are opened, and she recognises the man. The one she has laid everything before, who now gives her all the answer she needs. Mary.

And in an instant, she recognises him, she is the only person to know the truth, the only one who is there to see, and who can share the story with the whole world. And that is what she did. She went, as Jesus commanded her to, she told the disciples, I have seen the Lord. She shared with them all that he had said to her. Alleluia, Christ is Risen!!! Rabbouni. Teacher. Messiah. Lord. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

One person who has seen shares the story with eleven others. As we read over the next few weeks through the Acts of the Apostles, we will hear about so many others who hear and come to believe... ..who take up new ministries, make new starts, and welcome Jesus into their lives. In a few short years, the Church of God is formed and grows across the ancient world.

And here we are. Today is Easter Sunday. Christ is risen. Our busy period is up. I'm going on holiday this afternoon!! We've been busy, we've run through holy week, shared every step of the journey at full speed, perhaps even by the skin of our teeth at times. And now, we're there. Now, we can rest. Now, we can come to the Altar this morning, look Jesus in the face, receive him in our hearts, and give thanks that he lives, saves, and promises life to us.

And for those who believe that today has something to do with the Crucifixion, but they can't quite remember what... For those who watch our busyness but don't understand why... For those who wait in the background, watching it all go on around them... what are we going to do for them?

From one woman, Mary Magdalene, the Apostle to the Apostles, a worldwide church has grown up, which rejoices today with her Lord. We join with her today at the empty tomb. We join in those words as we acclaim that Christ is Risen. But what difference will that make to those around us? How have these words changed our lives? How are we different because Christ is Risen? And what are we about to do about it?

This is my opportunity to say thank you to all of you who have filled in Stewardship response forms over the last weeks. It is wonderful how many of you have said you would like to take on something new, something different, something which will help this church to travel forwards.

Over the coming weeks, I will be in touch with everyone who has handed a form in, and I, Rev'd Emily, Rev'd Jean and the Churchwardens look forward to continuing to see this church stand proud and share the good news, which we will do because of you. Thank you again, and let's look to the future, as we rejoice in the joy of the Resurrection, and share those words with the world: Alleluia. Christ is Risen!