

**Luke 24: 1-12, Acts 10: 34-43 L Vawer**

**He is not here! He is risen !**

Today we celebrate the most important festival in the Christian year.

We've walked the journey with Jesus into Jerusalem, through adulation rejection – through trial , scrouging and finally crucifixion. We've waited in the dead space of Holy Saturday and here we are in the now, of the third day in full celebration of the resurrection.

Alleluia . alleluia . its worth saying twice.

However, we are constantly faced with sad news in our world and high on the list of sadness must be the Ukraine, alongside many others throughout our world who are filled with fear. How can we remain hopeful in a word that has so much sadness in it? Where there are so many who are yet to know the joy we feel today?

Our answer to that question rests absolutely on Easter. We celebrate the fact that our Lord Jesus is risen from the dead. Why else would we have spent so long thinking about and dwelling on the death of Jesus last week? It is not because it is a happy cheerful story. There is much to make us sad. But we cannot remain sad because Jesus is risen from the dead!

**This is a story** backed up by much strong evidence. We have several different accounts in scripture about the resurrection; the fact that they are not all identical points to them being true.

**This is a story** that tells us something about ourselves.

**This is a story** that tells us about who we should be.

The women, including Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, have set off early on the Sunday morning. As night was falling on Friday they saw where Joseph of Arimathea had placed the body of Jesus in a tomb. They had gone home and got ready perfumes and spices to anoint his body; I wonder if they spent the whole of that Sabbath breathing in a heady and sickly smell as they waited? Now at last they can travel to the tomb in the early light of day. It might have been a relief that the heavy stone door has been rolled away from the tomb but they are in for a shock. They had planned to anoint the body of Jesus, to complete the funeral ceremonies that time had cut short on Friday, but they could not do it. The body was gone.

We are told that they stood there wondering. Wondering what? What had happened? Who could be so cruel to take Jesus body and deny the one last thing they could do for Him? In common with everybody else, it is obvious that they had no expectation that Jesus would rise from the dead. They had not the faintest idea. Some of the absurd theories have, the disciples cooking up a plan to steal the body of Jesus and pretend that he was risen, but that also seems to have been far from their minds.

As far as they were concerned, Jesus was dead. Bad things happen to good people, and a bad thing had happened to their Jesus. It confirmed their worldview that this is a world where in the end everybody will die.

And then two men appear in the gloom, the brightness and the shock of it fills them with fright. When the men speak, it is to shine a light on the women's preconceptions and worldview.

***"Why are you looking for the living among the dead?"***

An optimist looks at a half filled glass and says it is half full; a pessimist looks at a half filled glass and says it is half empty; an engineer looks at a half filled glass and asks why the specifications for the glass were not given correctly.

We all tend to be pessimists. Our first thought is to see why things cannot be done. If any change or new project is suggested, we are tempted to see only the possible pitfalls and dangers.

***"Why are you looking for the living among the dead?"*** No wonder we go around with our eyes pointing at the ground, as it were. It does seem that there is much to depress us in this world.

***"Why are you looking for the living among the dead?"*** The new thing that has happened is that Jesus is risen! All the women have to go on is the evidence of a body that was missing and the words of the men.

The men say something that works for them and for us too.

***"He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " Then they remembered his words."***

Then they remembered .... This is what we do, day by day, week by week, year by year. We break bread and share wine to remember. We sing carols and add prayers to our Christmas tree. We crack Easter with the children, and we break eggs to remember. We tell again the life-giving stories from God's word to remember.

For the women, it seems that the evidence of their eyes (the absence of the body) and the words of the men only kicked in when they united them with the words of Jesus.

We have the words of Jesus preserved for us. Luke goes on at the end of this gospel and into the Book of Acts to tell us how God's Holy Spirit will bring Jesus' words to life in our hearts. The penny will drop. This is who we are – the people who face darkness with the light of the risen Jesus!

**And who should we be?** The women could not keep this news to themselves. They had to tell others. So they tell the remaining eleven (male) disciples. The response is not positive or polite. What a load of inane, silly, pointless, gossipy nonsense.

Some of us are wary of taking part in evangelistic activities. It was all right of them of old, in the bible because everyone believed them ..... Really? They arrive with literally the greatest story ever told, and they are laughed at. Luke tells us that only one of the hearers, Peter, chose to go to the tomb, and he saw the strips of linen left behind by Jesus (the tomb was not empty). If you read on you will see that the others took notice of what Peter had to say – annoying isn't it.

Peter, the impetuous Peter. The Peter who questions and denies three times. Peter the rock. But in Acts Peter confidently sets out first century bullet points outlining Jesus ministry, getting over to an astonished crowd how God had organised the salvation of humankind but not in the way that they were expecting. Jesus had come and knocked down the barriers of rules, rites, rituals and exclusions and opened up a kingdom of love to all and in doing so undermined all the control and hierarchy of Judaism. He hadn't come to just be there **FOR** the sick, the outcast, the down trodden – he had come to be **WITH** them, to heal and restore from the inside.

So we cannot ignore Peter as he reminds of Jesus words

***<sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify***

If we have received good news, really good news, then it changes the way we see the world and we find it difficult to keep quiet about it. The world that is just outside our church doors, just outside our own front door, the world that is our family, our friends our neighbours.

And here is where I talk about fleas. Fleas have an amazing capacity for jumping. A really good flea can jump as high as 7.9 inches. Put it in a glass and with practice it could jump right out of it. But put a mat on the top and eventually it will stop even trying.

I think maybe we are a bit like fleas. We limit ourselves for many reasons, we put a mat on the top of our mission, and it limits our potential to reach those we are commanded to reach out to and be with.

At Easter Jesus smashes the mat right off the top of our glass walls and says you are part of my story and I send you

Go out to love and serve the Lord,

In the name of Christ

Amen