

## Easter Day 21<sup>st</sup> April 2019

**Acts 10**<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism <sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. <sup>36</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

<sup>39</sup> 'We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. <sup>41</sup> He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

John 20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the

stone had been removed from the entrance. <sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

<sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

<sup>11</sup> Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb <sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

<sup>13</sup> They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' <sup>14</sup> At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').

<sup>17</sup> Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' "

<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.

## **Prayer**

I had a lovely time in all three classes in year four at Forefield Juniors when I told them the Easter story – using props- albeit a little too enthusiastically when I put the crown of thorns on my head and accidentally scraped my nose- it hurt! They had fabulous questions too: the nature of the Trinity, Mary, God the Father.....and where the Easter bunny fitted in!

I had all the "artefacts" as the teacher called them in a line: a frying pan and pancake, sand for the desert, washing bowl and towel, chalice and cup, purple cloth, nails and cross and then we came to Easter Day; its not a church school so one has to be sensitive to those from all faith backgrounds and none. I told them that up to Easter Sunday all historic Jewish, Muslim and christian writing agrees- Jesus was a real person who lived and was killed in Jerusalem 30 AD or thereabouts. But on Easter Sunday one can either believe the Christian history and testimony of those who encountered the risen Christ or not. I told them I believed it and they would have to decide for themselves what they believed. Its a decision we all have to make at some time or another and when we decide, then what we do about it!

Faith is believing in the risen Christ

The first encounters with Him were completely unexpected, astonishing, and so joyous.

Mary went into the garden to mourn, to honour with her spices and presence. Certainly not to encounter Jesus- that was the last thing she was expecting.

I can imagine her crying until she could cry not more and hearing the voice "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" and answering without even looking up "Sir,

if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him' for she thinks he is a stranger.

Only when Jesus speaks her name does she recognise Jesus.

It is one of the characteristics of the many of the encounters with the risen Christ –his unrecognizability or otherness is such that we can only truly encounter him firstly as a stranger: in the garden as Mary did, on the road to Emmaus, or on the beach at Galilee, and then by drawing closer, getting deeper, we can know Him as Lord of life.

As Rowan Williams writes, "we witness the crucifixion of Jesus our friend and encounter the risen Christ; the stranger"

It calls to mind the Message bible interpretation of the second beatitude *you're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.*

All those who encountered the risen Christ were mourning the loss of their friend Jesus, the loss of a future with Him, the loss of their hopes and dreams. In their bereavement they had dispelled any notion of Jesus the worldly King, the promised Messiah to throw the Romans out of

Jerusalem. They were in a void of grief and fear- for the Romans might well kill Jesus' followers as well, and were lost; they had lost what was most dear to them so they were free to embrace The One most dear to them; the stranger who was more powerful and extraordinary than they could ever have imagined

And their, and our, experience of Jesus has to be bigger and deeper than Jesus our friend who died for us. It has to include Christ:

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

I love this passage from Colossians which tries desperately to capture some of the height and depth and width and breath of the Cosmic Christ.

In Roman Catholic Churches the cross is often portrayed with the suffering Christ upon it. But in protestant churches such as our own, it is more usually empty. This is not to lessen Jesus' sacrifice and suffering on the cross, but to say that that is not the culmination of Christ's glory. Easter Sunday is God's glory on earth, a foretaste of the Kingdom resurrection and a glimpse of the cosmic Christ who can overcome death through his life, death and resurrection. It is as if we have an old fashioned egg timer with sand trickling down from the top to the bottom. At the top is heaven and at the bottom earth; they meet in the resurrected Christ, maker of heaven and earth, Lord of Life, defeater of death, bringer in of God's kingdom, and an embodiment of God here on earth.

To be honest it's really hard to get your head around, how did it happen, what was it like, ...let alone where the Easter bunny fits in! It's a question of faith, it's a matter of trust, and then it's an issue of whether we will continue to have Christ as a stranger in our lives or as a friend? And if we decide to, then we have to be prepared to accept him not simply as our friend, but as the Lord of life, and that can lead us into extraordinary places and things; for Peter in our first reading it led him to Cornelius house and the knowledge that God shows no favouritism, for me God's journey included leaving the NHS and becoming a vicar, for you??? But don't be surprised if it leads you into some

dark places before you encounter the glory; God is a God who sometimes needs to clear space in our hearts and minds to make way for new encounters and ultimate truth. What is your story of encounter with the Lord of Life...has it really begun? If so what is your next adventure going to be?