

Sermon – John 18

The passage is all about emerging – from mourning and sadness into celebration – from darkness into light. The women see the empty tomb and at first are afraid, but then come to realise what has happened. Jesus' body hasn't been taken – Jesus has been raised from the dead!

This is a wonderful reading to hear the story of the first Easter morning – and as if all the uncertainty the disciples went through during the lead up to the time of Jesus arrest, trial and crucifixion wasn't enough – their teacher now dead, they are adrift as to what to do - and we now enter into another aspect of the mystery of the Easter story

They visit the tomb and find it empty – thinking someone has taken the body they leave bewildered – but Mary stays – not wanting to let go she seeking something to hold on to of her Lord and Master – and in her seeking – Jesus is revealed to her...

She then runs to tell the others – that Jesus is alive.

If someone came and told you that someone you knew had come back to life – what would you make of it – what an idea to get your head around – but that's what the disciples had to do. As the promise of new and eternal life was shown to us – the outpouring of what Jesus had been trying to tell them all along – they had to enter into probably one of the most incredible dramas of their lives.

And isn't that what we've been doing this past year? Entering into a drama nobody could have even thought of eighteen months ago. If someone said that the world would be brought to a stand -still – that planes wouldn't fly – business would shut down – we would be locked down – everything would be locked down – what would you have said?

I wonder if – in 500 years from now – people would be saying the same about this time in history as people say about Jesus coming

back to life from the dead – don't be ridiculous! I don't care what what is written down and recorded – it is unbelievable and not possible....

When you put the experience of that first Easter in context like this – it makes you wonder, doesn't it, why there is so much doubt around it because it is so unbelievable.

And yes, it is unbelievable from a human point of view – but not from God's point of view ...

There is so much that is a mystery when all we can see is what is in front of us...

Jesus goes on to tell Mary to go and tell the others – she is the first to witness about the risen Jesus – all that our faith is built upon – that there is resurrection hope that can be born out of the darkness of our brokenness and broken world....

And at this point I always mention the fact that Jesus is risen and 'I have seen the Lord' aren't the same thing – and it was a lightbulb moment when I understood that – Jesus is risen is a statement to be believed or not – but 'I have seen the Lord' is tangible – an experience...

And remember – she was seeking Jesus – looking for evidence that he was with them still in some way – and as she sought him – it was then that she found him – in the form of a gardener, meeting her in the context of where she was – on the ground in her reality.

Have you noticed that there wasn't the same bewilderment and wonder that the fact that there were two angels in white seated where Jesus had been – they were used to the idea of super natural encounters – but even by their standards, the idea of the risen Lord was simple incredible...

But incredible or not – Mary saw the risen Lord – and we can believe her or not....

What would it take for you to truly believe her if you don't already?

We can choose to believe or not that the resurrection is true - but the message here seems to be that if we are open to believing it is then that the risen Lord will be revealed to us – in some way that we will understand in the world we are in right now – and that hope and joy and realisation that we are not alone – even when we are the only person in the place – will enter into our hearts and that is the quiet Jesus-joy that can be experienced through good times and challenging times – that through the kind words of friends – hugs when we are allowed – a demonstration of compassion by another human being – all those things will point to Jesus being with us on the ground through the hearts of those around us.

Resurrection is a promise of life after death – an act of grace that come to us in a way we can understand – a gift of hope to be accepted and clung onto – that life and love are stronger than the powers of evil and death - a powerful hopeful message

As we renew our baptism vows, I invite you to think on what we say – in the light of the resurrection being the true moment where the brokenness of the world – the behaviour that caused an innocent human to be crucified so as to keep the darker side of life living – is taken and turned around and renewed into the goodness and hope of new life devoid of the sin and pain – left on the cross as the spirit of Jesus was offered up, glorified, and returned to us as it enters into our hearts and minds – when we say we believe the story – and it is then we become part of the story – the resurrection hope of new life-story – where we take the baptism vows of believing and committing to follow the way of Jesus – and therefore making resurrection moments and experiences a reality for our lives – and the world we live in.

So as we look forward to Easter eggs and low-keyed celebrations as our situation allows – I pray that we will all be amazed at how we can enter into the Easter of our own lives and renew the hope that brighter days are to come – and a greater sense of belonging and

purpose is ours to encounter, experience, and to be joyful in - as the confusion of the empty tomb – and the confusion of pandemic times will be broken as we seek – and then hear the voice of a saviour calling us by name and touch our hearts so we can join with Mary and say 'I have seen the Lord' – 'he is risen indeed' – Alleluia...