

### The day the Son rose...

Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Zebedee had been amongst Jesus' disciples. They'd been there throughout his ministry. They'd been there when the crowds had cheered Jesus as he approached Jerusalem, and then seen the people steadily turn away from – if not turn against him.

They'd heard the cries of 'Hosanna' of Palm Sunday turn to cries of 'Crucify him' by Friday.

They'd seen Jesus beaten, they'd seen the crown of thorns placed on his head, they'd watched him carry the cross to Golgotha.

And there they'd seen Jesus nailed to the cross, and raised up.

On the Friday afternoon, after Jesus had cried 'it is finished' and had bowed his head and given up his spirit, it seemed that it was all over. It seemed that all they had hoped for had come to an end. They wondered how it happened, after all, they'd seen Jesus do the impossible:

He'd made the blind see and the lame walk,

He'd cured disease,

He'd cast out demons,

He'd fed the multitudes from a few loaves and fishes.

He'd even raised the dead – Jairus' daughter, the widow at Nain's son and his friend Lazarus.

Miracles. Miracles beyond their imagination.

But it was all over on that Friday afternoon.

These women had watched Jesus die. There were no miracles to save him. Hanging on a cross, nails in hands and feet, gasping for air, they had heard him call out with the last bit of energy he could muster, "It is finished." And he was dead.

When Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took Jesus' body down from the cross, they'd watched the two men wrap Jesus' body in the shroud and place him in Joseph's own tomb - tomb cut out of solid rock. They would have watched as a huge stone was rolled across the entrance of the tomb, sealing the dead Jesus in his grave forever - or so they thought.

Luke tells us that they went home and prepared the spices and perfumes to anoint Jesus' body... but the next day was the Sabbath, so they had to wait until Sunday.

It was a long day and a long night. If they ventured to the synagogue, it would have been a painful reminder of the loss of their rabbi, Jesus. The teacher who could interpret the scriptures like no one else. The one who had claimed that he would fulfil those very scriptures.

Then it was another long night.

Luke tells us says that they went to the tomb on Sunday morning with the spices, but Matthew tells us simply that the women got up early and went to look at the tomb of Jesus. Perhaps to pray, perhaps to grieve, perhaps to just sit quietly and remember Jesus.

At this point in the story, though, something startling happens. Something unimaginable. In fact, Matthew details things which aren't recorded in the other gospels.

“There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.” (Matthew 28:2-4).

There was an earthquake, not just a tremor or gentle rumble, but a violent earthquake. Sure enough, Jesus’ resurrection would shake up people’s understanding of who he was, and indeed rock the whole world.

Imagine what it was like for Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, who had witnessed Jesus’ death, witnessed his entombment, and were ready to anoint his body. Just as they’d seen the huge stone rolled over the entrance of the tomb on Friday, now they saw the angel, dazzling in white, roll the stone away and sit on it.

The guards who had been stationed at the tomb by Pilate fell to the ground like dead men.

And then the angel spoke “Do not be afraid” (which seems to be a standard angelic greeting). “...I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.” (28:5-6)

I think it’s remarkable that the stone wasn’t rolled away by the angel in order to let Jesus out - Jesus had already risen. It was rolled away just so that the two Marys could look inside and see for themselves that the tomb was empty.

I love the detail of the angel sitting on the rock – he’s done his job, and now he’s having a rest, but even then, he’s reassuring the two Marys.

Then, still sitting on the rock, the angel tells the women what to do next - Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” (28:7)

Matthew, doesn’t tell us if the women actually went inside the tomb, but whether they stepped inside or simply glanced in, they were convinced. And while they were afraid – or perhaps in awe at the power of God – they ran, they ran filled with joy to tell the disciples. The impossible had happened. Jesus who had died, had risen. Jesus was alive again!

We can look back at Good Friday and know what Jesus had accomplished – what he’d finished – that the price of sin had been paid, Jesus taking the sins of the world on his shoulders as he’d spread out his arms in love for us – for all people – on that cross. But it wasn’t until Sunday morning, that we could know for sure. Until Jesus was raised from the dead, confirming the sacrifice of Good Friday was sufficient.

And his resurrection not only confirmed the sacrifice of Good Friday was sufficient, but confirmed all those claims made by Jesus were true.

Easter – the day the Son rose - shows us that there is life beyond the grave. Death is no longer final – remember those wonderful words from Hosea (13:14) “I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?” which Paul references in 1 Corinthians 15 (vs 55) “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” which is in turn echoed in the great hymn ‘Abide with me’ – “Where is death’s sting? Where, grave, thy victory?”

Jesus' return from the grave allows us to face death with new confidence. And to face life with new confidence too.

When Jesus rose from the dead, he proved that the sacrifice of his life on the cross was acceptable for all of our sins. Jesus is risen. If he had not returned on that first Easter Sunday, his death would not be any different to that of any other human death. But his death was for us – for our sins - and his resurrection shows that the debt for past sins has been paid. When he was at Cornelious' house, Peter explained, "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). Paul confirms this as he writes to the Romans, "[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." (Romans 4:25).

Paul also tells us "...that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:4).

We may have a new life! A new life through Jesus. A new life, a good life, a life closer to God, a life closer to each other. A life which is meaningful and hopeful.

Because our old lives can hang over us. We've all bad stuff. We've hurt other people – whether we've meant to or not. We've neglected others. Sometimes unintentionally, sometimes not. We've put ourselves first, and taken advantage of others.

Many people will point out our failings to us. But often, we realise our own shortcomings. We feel guilty. We feel embarrassed. And we realise that we are just not good enough.

Paul reflects that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

But as we come to know Jesus – we can realise that that God has dealt with all those things. All those sins which cause us to fall short of God's glory.

Sure, our past may embarrass us. People may judge us and think badly about us because of what has happened in the past but ... ultimately, God has dealt with that past. He has erased it with the blood of Christ. We are forgiven. And we know it is true because of Jesus' resurrection.

We won't be perfect. Our lives won't be perfect. But they will be moving in the right direction.

And even though we can be confident in Jesus, in his sacrifice, and in the hope that he gives all who turn to him in faith, things will still hurt us.

We will lose people we love.

Relationships will fail.

We will become ill and frail.

We will see people we love suffering.

And of course, beyond our immediate surrounds, we see so much wrong with the world.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused death, suffering and displacement.

Natural disasters in our own country and across the world are a constant reminder of the fragility of life.

The oppression and exploitation of people continues without end.

And while all these things hurt us, and those we love. And all of these things are beyond our ability to solve, Easter, the day the Son rose points us to – and assures us of – a resolution of all these things. The alleviation of pain and suffering.

In Jesus life and ministry we saw glimpses of the kingdom of heaven breaking through to the world. The healing of disease and blindness. The feeding of the hungry. The casting out of evil influence. Even the raising of the dead.

But in his resurrection, we see the kingdom of God arriving.

Jesus, the son of God, our saviour was dead, but is alive – not just alive two thousand odd years ago, but alive today – at the end of his gospel, Matthew (28:20) tells us that Jesus promised “surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The women went to the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning, sad, confused and grieving. After encountering the angel with the news of Jesus’ resurrection, and seeing the empty tomb, they ran back to the disciples excited and joyful. Easter had changed them.

But even as they were rushing to the disciples, Matthew tells us that “Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”” (28:9-10)

They fell at his feet, clasped them, and worshiped him. No observant Jewish person would ever worship anything or anyone other than God who had revealed himself to Abraham, to Jacob, to Moses, and to the prophets. After all, the first of the Ten Commandments emphatically states “I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods besides me. – – You shall not bow down or worship them. I am an envious God.”

But the Marys worshipped the risen Jesus. They had believed that he was the Messiah, and destined for the throne of David but now these women recognized Jesus as God. And they reacted in the only appropriate way—in worship.

Worship is more than coming to church. More than praying and telling God how great he is. Worship is the recognition of Jesus as God, the Son – not just a man of God. And the proper response in worship is to humble ourselves before him – metaphorically bow down to him – and offering him ourselves.

With the news of Jesus’ resurrection, the fears of the disciples were dispelled, they became people of boldness who would be witnesses of the good news.

Just like the angel had sent the women to share the news of Jesus’ resurrection, so too does Jesus himself “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me”.

And since that time, the message of the resurrected Jesus has been proclaimed. By those women. By those disciples who were in hiding on that first Easter morning. And it has been proclaimed over the years by countless people to the ends of the earth. It remains good news today. Good news for us. Good news for us to take into our hearts. Good news to share with others.

It was in the power of the risen Jesus that the early Christians went out to share the gospel and change the world - and we are called to do the same today.

So on this Easter Sunday, on the anniversary of the day the Son rose, that risen Son is still there for us – for you and me. Put your faith, put your trust in Jesus, the risen Lord and Saviour.

Trust the one who loved you so much that he gave his life for you.

Trust the one who has conquered death and the grave.

Follow him today and always,

Know his love for you,

and share that love with others.

Amen.