

Easter 2015

Early in the morning when the women went to the tomb, if anyone had asked them what they most wanted in the world, they surely would have answered that it would be to get to the tomb and find that Jesus was alive.

But we humans are very complicated. Sometimes, if what we want turns out to be true, it is deeply scary.

When life turns upside down after a death, it is the knowledge that there are tasks to be done that can keep us going. The registration, the funeral preparations, these are the set duties that we have to perform. The same was true in the time of Jesus. The women had to prepare the body properly, as they hadn't had a chance to do it earlier because of the Sabbath. They went sad, numb with grief, but secure in what they had to do. This shared task was holding everything together for them.

But when they got there

they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 'But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised

And they were afraid.

Why, when it was what they longed to be true?

I remember when I went to a selection conference to see if I would be accepted on to training for ordination. About a week or so after I got back I was upstairs and the phone rang. It was the Bishop. I was afraid.

I was afraid the answer would be no, because who likes to be rejected.

I was even more afraid that the answer would be yes, because it would change my life forever, and I hadn't really until that moment taken on board all that that would mean for me and for my family. The implications were huge.

You may have felt the same, perhaps about getting married, or moving, or a taking a new job. Change is scary.

How much more then would those women be afraid? If they believed the evidence of their eyes, it would mean that Jesus, whom they had seen beaten, bleeding, dying, buried, was raised from the dead. The implications of this were enormous. It meant that the person they knew and loved really was the Messiah, really was the Son of God. It meant that all his teaching was truly what God wanted from us. They could no longer pretend that it didn't matter if they were grumpy, or selfish, if they borrowed something and didn't give it back. They were now, like it or not, in a different relationship to God. The whole of their life from now onwards, if they took this seriously, would be completely different, and that difference would not just affect them, but their families and friends.

We are told that the women were asked to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee, but they were too afraid to say anything.

This is where the original gospel of St Mark is thought to have ended, but more text was later added later giving brief details of how Jesus himself appeared first to Mary Magdalen and then to others, including all the disciples. This original ending is a great challenge to us. We have not seen the risen Christ. He hasn't stood in our room at home and showed us his hands and his feet. We haven't been able to touch his side. We have only the words of the gospel. So like the women, we are not forced to believe, and we are afraid. Because if we believe, if we really take on board that Jesus is not just a good kind man, not just a great teacher, not just a holy man, but the Son of God who has been raised from the dead, then we have to accept the enormous implications that this has for the remainder of our lives.

Christ is risen, therefore we have hope, and must live as people with hope.

There is war in the Middle East, terrible violence against Christians and many others. We could despair.

But Christ is risen, therefore we have hope, and must live as people with hope, working for peace.

There is a rising tide of plastic poisoning the oceans, and the rain forest is being destroyed once more at alarming rates.

But Christ is risen, therefore we have hope, and must live as people with hope, working to protect our environment.

There are people dying of poverty and avoidable disease.

But Christ is risen, therefore we have hope, and must live as people with hope, working against injustice.

If we believe, we live with the knowledge that darkness can be overcome, that heaven can be built on earth, that death will never have the last word. It means that every small deed that we do can bring forward the time when the earth will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

When finally, the women and the disciples saw the risen Jesus and believed, they received the Holy Spirit and were empowered to live lives of generosity and sacrifice, lives committed to spreading the good news, bringing all into a close relationship with God.

You and I, in our time on earth, may never know for certain, may never see the risen Christ, or eat fish with him on the lakeside, but we have a choice.

We can choose to believe, or we can choose to ignore. There is no halfway house.

And if we choose to believe, we have to live lives of hope and generosity, following his teaching, knowing that this will make a difference to the whole world.

Christ is risen, therefore we have hope, and must live as people with hope. Amen.