

Easter

12 4 09

My text this morning may be found at the end of today's gospel from John, 'Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord".' (20 v18)

Happy Easter.

The sadness, pain and loss of Holy Week are over. It is dawn on Sunday morning when, according to John, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb only to discover that the stone had been rolled away. She hurries back to share her fear with the disciples that 'they', whoever the 'they' might be, have removed Jesus' body from his last resting place. Peter and John run off to the tomb, Mary following behind. John gets there first, Peter enters the tomb first and they are the first to confirm her fears that Jesus' body has vanished. The disciples go back, leaving a confused and distressed Mary to weep alone. Except she is not alone. Two men are now in the tomb who ask why she's crying so she tells them. Then, sensing someone behind her, she turns and sees someone she takes to be the gardener. In her distress and confusion, through her tears, she asks this man where they have taken Jesus' body and so Mary Magdalene is the first person to encounter the risen Lord Jesus.

The Resurrection is what is distinctive about our faith. As Christians, we believe in life after death. We believe in life eternal. We believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. As such, we are saying that though we

recognise that we are mortal and that we will all eventually die, we believe that as conscious individuals we will survive the death of our physical body to experience the joy and the delight of heaven in the presence of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Christianity is life-affirming. It values this life and values each one of us. Christianity affirms that God not only created the universe and all that is therein but also values human beings whom he created in his own image. He values us so much that he wants to have an individual relationship with each one of us. He values us sufficiently to make that individual relationship possible by becoming a human being like us, by being born, by living and eventually by dying. Christianity is about birth and death, life on earth and eternal life in heaven.

The victory of life over death, of being over non-being, is the message of the empty tomb: that God, in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, has died then risen from the dead so that we in turn may enjoy new life in him. The empty tomb is a powerful symbol of that central pillar of our belief. Jesus had a body as we all do and that body ceased to function when he was executed on the cross on Good Friday. His body was laid in the tomb with proper reverence and respect according to the burial rites of 1st century Judaism. By Easter morning, his last resting place was empty. The shroud in which they had wrapped his body was neatly folded and left on one side as was the cloth Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had placed over his head. If the body had been snatched from its tomb, the grave-robbers would not have left the grave clothes behind. In some respects, the linen recycled would have more value than the body itself. But the

grave clothes left in the tomb and the presence of the two angels therein are signs something incredible has happened: that Jesus has no need of grave clothes since he has overcome the darkness of death to emerge into the light of day, to all intents and purposes dressed like any man of the time and easily mistaken by Mary in her confusion for a gardener.

So in wishing you Happy Easter today I am affirming our belief in the love and goodness of God who has given us life in all its fullness, a life not only experienced in the flesh but in the life of the world to come.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

12th April, 2009

H: Sermon 19: Easter

