

Easter Day

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Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory.

My text is from Luke chapter 24 from verses 1 & 2: 'they came to the tomb. . . they found the stone rolled away . . . they did not find the body.'

Jesus is dead. His death, his loss, has left the disciples desolate, grief-stricken. It is now left to the women at daybreak on the morning of the day after the Sabbath to go to garden tomb of Joseph Arimathea where he and Nicodemus had laid Jesus' corpse to rest. And when they got there, they found all was not well. Their intention had been reverently to anoint Jesus' body with spices according to their burial customs: a labour of love the imminence of the Sabbath had prevented. That's why they arrived so early: to do the necessary work as quickly as possible before the inevitable work of corruption took hold.

We have heard this morning the account according to St Luke. According to Luke there were three women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James. And these three are granted a vision of two angels, men whose clothes shine with

an unearthly radiance, two men who ask them a challenging question: 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?'

If Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James could have understood what was being implied by the angels' question, then they would at that very moment known the truth of Easter: that Jesus Christ has risen from the grave. But I doubt they understood what was being said to them even though they heard the words. They knew that Jesus was dead: they had seen him die; they had seen his lifeless body taken down from the cross; they had seen where the body was entombed. As eye-witnesses of his death, it was unbelievable for them that Jesus should be anything other than dead, his earthly body anything more than a corpse. Yet this is what the angels are saying when they ask the question of Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James.

Then to make things crystal clear, the angels explain by telling the women what had happened and by reminding them of what Jesus had already told them: 'He is not here, but has risen. They say, 'Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' So the penny finally drops and they remember and thrilled, they go back to tell the disciples who don't believe a word of they say but dismiss it all as an idle tale. But according to Luke, Peter runs off to see for himself and finds the tomb empty with the linen clothes lying there abandoned. Peter then returns home 'amazed at what had happened.'

What we have here is the key moment in the life of Jesus: his rising from the dead on the third day. The Resurrection is the most important event in our Christian story of salvation for it is the moment when the old order of sin and death is broken by the love of God for us, in that he was prepared to die for us so that we might enjoy the life of the world to come.

The women at first believed Jesus was dead therefore could not understand what was going on. The disciples dismissed what the woman told them as an 'idle tale' because they could not get their head round the miracle of the empty tomb. Peter went there to see for himself and he returned home 'amazed'.

The problem for us as Christians is we have heard it all before so something of the wonder of this, the greatest of all Jesus' miracles, may be lost on us. Perhaps something of the shine has been taken off the angels' garments. But Easter is wonderful because it points to a central truth in our faith that we believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Death now can hold no real terror for us for the end of life is really the beginning of life eternal.

So this Easter Day may we reflect on the experience of the three women going to anoint Jesus' corpse and instead discovering the stone rolled away, the tomb empty and the linen clothes lying abandoned on the stone slab. And may we ponder in our heart the truth for us of the angels' question: 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?'

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

4th April, 2010

H: Sermon 21: Easter

