

St Marc Grenoble
Easter Sunday, 9th April, 2023
John 20: 1 - 18
Acts 10: 34 - 43
'Risen!'

Good Morning again, A Very Happy Easter! **Pray**

Before I share my reflections, I'd love to know what you made of the Easter story. What was going through your mind as the passages were read afresh this morning?? I changed the readings around, so we had the correct time order, which makes things a little easier to understand.

Before we explore the Gospel reading, I want to comment very briefly on the passage from Acts. Cornelius, a devout God fearing Roman Centurion was told by God, in a vision, to send for Peter to hear an important message from God. In the same way God also told Peter to go. What is remarkable about this story is that this is the first time God instructed Peter to go and teach Gentiles about Jesus, and to tell them that God loves Gentiles just as much as Jewish people. Let's be clear God loves all of us, and wants us all to love Him and serve Him.

But let's get back to our Gospel reading:

Can you imagine how the disciples were feeling over that weekend?

Their nightmare began after Passover supper together on Thursday evening. Jesus said things about going away; things they didn't understand. Then, they went to the Garden of Gethsemane - on the Mount of Olives. A place they often met and prayed.

They all knew the place, but so did Judas. He brought soldiers and temple officials - who arrested Jesus. What was happening? Jesus, the Messiah, it seemed, almost willingly giving himself up, without even a struggle.

At that stage, most of the disciples decided to make themselves scarce, in case they got arrested too. They ran away! They weren't just scared, they were terrified.

Only John and Peter followed Jesus and the soldiers - at a safe distance - to the high priest's house; they managed to get into the courtyard because John knew some of the staff. It was difficult and very risky.

Three times Peter had to pretend he didn't know Jesus, simply to save his own skin. But, when he heard a cock crow, he was suddenly overcome with guilt and grief; he realised Jesus had predicted Peter would disown Him. He'd even predicted it would happen three times before the cock crowed.

There was the dreadful day on Friday. How could Jesus, their Messiah, just allow the soldiers to crucify Him? He just seemed to accept it, without question - Why?

Can you imagine how the disciples felt on Friday night and Saturday? They'd given up everything to follow Jesus for three years; and now? They'd given up their jobs, and livelihoods, three years of their lives to follow Jesus, and now ... what? Jesus, their friend, their rabbi, their Messiah - was lying in a borrowed grave!

Only the women managed to go to the cross and watch as Jesus died; and they watched Joseph and Nicodemus too, as they took Jesus' body down from the cross and made hurried burial preparations. The women promised themselves to go back after the Sabbath and properly finish the burial that had been so hastily started.

That's where we came in this morning. Mary and her friends went to the grave before dawn. They wanted to show their love for Jesus ... by caring for his body. When they arrived, they were alarmed to see the stone had already been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. (one Gospel suggests an earthquake) The body had disappeared! ... But, who had taken it?

Panic set in. Mary ran as fast as she could, to find Peter and John; she was breathless, and probably sobbing ... but she managed to get the words out: "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!"

Now it was Peter and John's turn to run; they couldn't believe what they heard; and ran to the tomb, to see for themselves. John arrived first, bent down and peered in – he could see the empty grave clothes lying there. He hesitated, but didn't go in.

When Peter arrived, breathless, he went straight into the tomb - just what you'd expect of Peter. He saw the grave clothes lying - like an empty chrysalis when the butterfly has gone. The head cloth folded to one side. That's not what he'd expected.

Peter realised that wasn't how it would be if someone had stolen the body. Something was troubling Peter. What was it Jesus had said about "in a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me"?

Then, John stepped into the tomb and, as we read earlier, ... "He saw and believed!"

Although they began to believe what Jesus had told them; we're told they still didn't really understand what it was all about. They had, apparently, not linked what they had seen, to what Jesus had been saying when he likened himself to Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of the whale.

We're told they went back to their homes. I wonder what they were thinking? It seems they left Mary, by the tomb - bewildered and crying. As she wept, she peered inside the tomb and she saw two angels seated where Jesus' body had been.

It's remarkable. We're not told she jumped back in fright; she responded almost normally when they asked: "Woman, why are you crying?" She told them her problem - "They've taken my Lord away and I don't know where they've put him."

She caught sight of someone out of the corner of her eye. Without her realising, her prayer had been answered; here was her Lord, but she didn't recognise Him. Jesus repeated the question: "Woman, why are you crying?" Then, "Who is it you are looking for?" Only after she had blurted out "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him" - did He say, "Mary"

In that instant she recognised Him; and cried out "Rabboni!" - "My Master" She reached out to cling to His feet, as if she wouldn't let Him go again; but he told her "Don't hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father"

Then, He gave her a commission "Go instead to my brothers and tell them ' I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" He sent her to reassure the disciples. Mary went straight away - can you imagine her joy as she told them: "I HAVE SEEN THE LORD!" She shared the message He asked her to bring.

That's all John tells us; but Luke says "These words seemed like an idle tale, and they didn't believe them." That's odd; I don't think, by any stretch of the imagination, Mary would tell it as an idle tale. Possibly they thought everything was just too much for her and she'd had a funny turn - a hallucination.

Mark tells us: "When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it." That's more likely; she was a woman; culturally her testimony was unlikely to be listened to - women's testimonies were not held in high regard; which may be why, in His counter-cultural way, Jesus appeared to the women first.

It wasn't until later, when the disciples were all together locked in the room - because they were afraid of the authorities – that Jesus "came and stood among them" and said those wonderful words: 'Peace be with you!'

We can share that peace today; the peace Jesus brings us. Our saviour is risen! He has conquered sin and death once and for all for everyone who will acknowledge Him as their Saviour! ... What does that mean?? It means Jesus has paid the price so we may enjoy true Fellowship with God who created us and wants to live in Communion with us - and change our lives.

Jesus has conquered death's power over us. We're told in John 3:16-17: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

That promise is for all of us this Easter Morning. I pray you'll live, grasping the Joy of the promise and never let go. But remember Jesus says:"As the Father has sent me - I am sending you". **Our commission is to share the wonderful news of Easter with everyone we meet - so they can share the joy of Jesus' love too.**

Like Mary we have a wonderful message to share:

"THE LORD IS RISEN!" Peace be with you – He is risen indeed! Amen