

## EASTER MESSAGE

*By Rev Petra Elsmore*

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### **Gospel Reading** **Matthew 28.1-10**

*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.*

***2** 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. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. **4** The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.*

***5** The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. **6** He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. **7** 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.’*

***8** So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’*

### **Sermon**

Even after 2000 years of study and repetition, the Easter gospel remains difficult to preach on.

We have hosted (here) in North Marston the Schorne Team Holy Week Services this year and had, I believe, quite moving experience throughout the Holy Week, services of Evening Communion from Monday to Wednesday, Maundy Thursday with foot washing, the last supper and stripping of the altar, then

moving meditations on Good Friday lasting 3 hours. All these reflecting on the journey that took Jesus to the cross.

It seems a very fast movement in our services focusing on the events depicting the torture, death and burial of Christ to the news of his resurrection.

The turn of events is extraordinary and well, unbelievable.

Preachers try to be a story-teller. The art of preaching is to take truths about the deep things of life and of God and through the use of story, to relate them to daily life.

The trouble with Easter is that we are dealing with an event which is completely unlike any other event.

From bitter experience, we know that death is irreversible. The dead remain dead, no matter how much we would wish things to be otherwise. We know this as surely today as people knew it 2000 years ago. So how to preach about a man risen from death?

We cannot say, resurrection is like something else... because there is nothing else for it to be like.

(We may look for examples of new life and transformation, just as I did with the story of Carol, the caterpillar) but these examples are only coming close to help us with our imagination, yet they cannot truly explain and illustrate the totally unbelievable event of Jesus rising from the dead.

It's been only 3 days since Jesus died, when the women came to the tomb, so you can understand how grieved they still were, and what shock and terror they must have felt when the earthquake shook the earth and the angel appeared. Witnessing something like this shortly after going through the trauma of seeing Jesus crucified and buried, that would have been so scary for them. How could they possibly grasp and understand what was happening? How can we?

So given the situation, one may think, surely, the church would be much better off concentrating on the things that Jesus taught than trying to explain the resurrection? Is there not plenty else in the Gospels to keep us on the path toward God, without having to believe in the impossible?

The resurrection can neither be explained nor rationalised. It is unlike anything else that has ever happened in the history of the universe.... Apart from the creation of the universe itself...

The Angel said to the women who came to the tomb “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he has been raised from the dead”

This is the good news that we celebrate today. NOT because it is easy to believe. It isn't.

But because it is the very heart and beginning of our faith.

Belief in the resurrection **is** the leap of faith: the spark which started the fire: the foundation of the Christian faith and of the church.

Jesus lives! This is the meaning and the truth of Easter.

Jesus is not in a tomb on a Galilean hillside,  
Jesus is not between the pages of the bible,  
Jesus is not alive as an idea,

Jesus is alive in the hearts of countless millions of his followers,  
Jesus is alive in our hearts and we can know him just as surely as did the disciples who met him after the first Easter Sunday.

The Angel said to the women who came to the tomb “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he has been raised from the dead”

This is not a belief that grew up within the church – it did not slowly dawn that Jesus was alive within the experience of the

church – the resurrection faith is the seed around which the church itself grew.

People may sometimes be willing to die for an ideal. Not many are willing to die for a lie of their own making.

The resurrection transformed the invisible disciples into a group of fearless evangelists whose testimony and faith infected first Jerusalem and then the Roman Empire itself.

Here's how St Paul, who had his own dramatic encounter with the risen Jesus wrote about the resurrection:

*From 2 Corinthians 5*

**17** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*

“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” Jesus Christ is risen for the healing of everything that is broken. Every broken heart, every broken relationship and even the healing of the broken planet.

Easter promises that ultimately God will give our whole creation a new start... new beginning, total transformation.... and in the experience of Easter – in our own experience of Easter, that new world is already beginning.

The disciples emerged from their locked room to find that

Rome still occupied Palestine,  
that they were still wanted men,  
that evil and death still reigned.  
But they saw the old world in a whole new way.  
Hopelessness gave way to hope,  
fear to joy,

doubt to faith.

They became the people of hope, they became the people of reconciliation.

And so it is for us.

We woke up this morning into the world, which has still many failings, world which is broken and torn apart by violence, world in which we daily witness injustice and suffering,

And yet, in Christ, God has reconciled the world to himself,

And so through the resurrection of Jesus, we have too become people of hope, we have too become people of reconciliation. We have the task to live in this broken world and bring it healing, seek justice, relieve suffering, and offer love and comfort.

May we find strength and hope in the risen Christ to be able to carry this task out in our daily lives.

Amen.