

# Sermon for Easter Sunday, 31st March 2024

By Rev Janet Bayly

## Scripture Reading:

**Acts 10: 34-43**

*Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism 35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

*39 'We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'*

## Gospel Reading:

**Mark 16: 1-8**

*When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'*

*4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.*

*6 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."'*

*8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

## Sermon

Today is Sunday Easter Day, the day of Christ's resurrection. It seems as if the church has been resting during Lent with no flowers. But today it all comes to life. Take time to look at flowers and thank all those with the gift of making such lovely displays. Our churches are filled with light and colour, joy and celebration. Just as our gardens and fields are filled with new life, so the church appears to wake up and come alive again. The cross is empty and later will be filled with transforming colour. The first Easter offered forgiveness, freedom and a future. Today those are offered to each one of us.

Most of us will have heard of Alexie Navalny. He was a lawyer, opposition leader and anti corruption activist. He spoke out with great courage against Putin and was punished and subsequently died because of opposition to the repressive regime in Russia. He became a Christian later in life and his commitment for truth and justice came from his Christian Faith especially the beatitudes, the sermon on the Mount. We are probably familiar with the sayings which began, Blessed are those who One of the sayings was "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled" and this seemed to give Navalny his focus. Michael Bird the deputy principal of Ridley college wrote about Navalny and then went on to write that the resurrection means to Christians. He said that in the resurrection God undoes the worst that people can do. The power of His goodness gives hope for renewal and reconciliation. The very values that Navalny was striving for.

On the first day of the week when the two Marys and Salome went quietly and anxiously to the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid they wondered how they would be able to move the huge stone away. They carried myrrh and aloes which were the traditional spices to anoint Jesus' body. When they arrived at the tomb which belonged to Joseph of Aramethea who had had it made for his own burial, the women found that the stone was already rolled away and Jesus was not there. How bewildered and frightened they must have been and even the presence of an angel did not calm their fears. He spoke to them, reassuring them and told them that Jesus was alive and would meet them in Galilee. They were to tell the disciples and Peter. This is where Mark's gospel finishes with the women amazed and terrified by what they had witnessed. We read slightly different accounts in the other gospels that they did run back and tell the disciples and Peter, all that they had seen and heard.

On Good Friday, I was unable to get to the three-hour meditation. So, I listened to Sir David Suchet Reading St John's account of Christ's death and resurrection. It was very moving. John wrote that Peter and other disciples raced to the tomb after hearing Mary's account and found it empty apart from two angels. And we know that later the risen Christ specifically met with Peter to commission him to spread the gospel.

So in the reading from Acts we have the renewed and empowered apostle Peter giving his personal testimony to the life, death and resurrection of his Lord. Many years ago, I attended a girls grammar school in Greenwich. I had been brought up in a Christian home and made my own commitment at a Billy Graham rally. So that dates me.! I joined the Christian union at school and was asked to give my testimony. Rather like the women at the tomb I was terrified and looking at Peter's account, I wish that I had been able to speak like him. I remember quoting the text from John 15 v 16. As part of my talk. "You did not choose me but I chose you and I appointed you to bear fruit." Little do we know what God has in store for us.

God has chosen each one of us to bear fruit. It may be to do as Navalny did and speak out boldly against evil or give our testimony or to quietly live out the truth of the gospel. Christ's resurrection is transforming in its power to bring renewal, reconciliation and redemption to all. May we see God's power at work in our world bringing forgiveness, freedom and a future. Amen.