

Theme: - Easter Sunday

Today we celebrate the anniversary of Jesus rising from the dead, of all the Christian celebrations, including Christmas, this event overshadows all other Christian festivals. When we read the first ten verses of chapter 28 of Matthew's gospel we need to engage our imaginations, we need to cast aside what we would call logical behaviour, one thing you can certainly say about Jesus is that he wasn't predictable.

These ten verses relate to the most miraculous, to some people the most impossible event in history that has ever taken place, the resurrection from the dead of a fellow human being.

And as such these ten verses contain the very core of our Christian faith, because without the resurrection we have no faith, it is through faith that we know that Jesus rose from the dead.

St. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain." "We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised." "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised." "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins." "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished; if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied."

St Paul goes on to say from verse 20, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died." "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ."

St Paul in those words to the Corinthian church made it clear that Christ was indeed raised from the dead, and that through faith and trust in him he will also raise us to eternal life to be with him forever. That is our hope, and that is our joy, not that we go into oblivion but that we go up to heaven and meet face to face the loveliest man that ever lived, our Lord Jesus Christ, and those whom we love and who have gone before us.

So, as we go through these ten verses of our gospel reading, we need to always keep in the forefront of our minds the importance of these few words, that Christ was raised from the dead. Now the Jewish Sabbath is our Saturday and is the last day of the week and commemorates the day that God rested after the work of creation. And Sunday, the first day of the week for us, commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the day that Christ fought and won his last battle, the battle against death itself.

We are told in the first verse of our reading that very early on Sunday morning, probably at first light, Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, probably the mother of James, went to the tomb. Now Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, after Jesus had been taken down from the cross, had gone with Jesus' body on the Friday and witnessed the placement of his body into the tomb, and witnessed the stone being rolled across the front of it. So, there was no mistaking, by either Mary, which tomb Jesus' body was placed in. But as they approached the tomb suddenly there was a violent earthquake.

People in the Middle East knew all about earthquakes and the devastation they can cause and the thousands of people who can die as a result of them, but they would have realised that this was no ordinary earthquake, because it seems to have stopped almost as soon as it started. But at the same time as the earthquake and angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled the stone away and sat on it and told them not to be afraid. I can believe that this may have been less frightening, had not an angel who was like lightning with clothes as white as snow hadn't also spoken to them. We must remember that people didn't have washing powder then, and clothes, would at best, be a dingy grey, but never as white as dazzling snow.

So here are ordinary people going to see the tomb of Jesus for reasons not given, but possibly to check on the flowers which had been placed there on the Friday. When suddenly all this happened, earthquakes, and angels in dazzling clothes rolling away the stone at the tomb entrance, and they didn't faint away in utter terror, or run away screaming. They clearly had more courage than I may have shown, and certainly more courage than the guards had shown, because they shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to them, "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised, just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying."

Those words appear so matter of fact, so ordinary, and yet refer to a totally mind boggling event as the raising of a person from the dead, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But they were clearly spoken with such authority as to be very convincing, because the two women didn't hesitate but went straight into the tomb and saw that Jesus wasn't there and believed the impossible, that is, that a human being had risen from the dead. Then the angel added, "Go quickly now and tell the disciples

that he has been raised from the dead, and indeed is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him". Then the angel added, "This is **my** message for you."

Those last six words, "This is my message for you." was God giving them the authority to take **his** good news to the disciples, and that the message was no longer their news, or their message, this was now God's news and God's message to his disciples. So, they left the tomb quickly, but with very mixed emotions, probably overjoyed at the extraordinary news to tell but very fearful that nobody would believe them and dismiss them as cranks.

But then as they were running to see the disciples Jesus suddenly met them and welcomed them by saying, "Greetings!" The women were stopped in their tracks; all their fears from visiting the tomb were replaced by awe and wonder. If there had been any doubts about Jesus rising from the dead then those doubts would have been put aside once and for all because there he was as large as life talking to them; and there response was to fall at his feet and worship him.

Suddenly all the things that had taken place over the last two years or so all fell into place and their reaction was to worship him, because the only logical response was to realise that he was indeed the Son of God; there could be no doubt about it now. And Jesus then reassured them not to be afraid; Jesus was saying that although he had now been elevated to God's right hand nevertheless he was still that loving kind considerate person he had always been, and with regard to his love for us that hasn't changed. Jesus then added, "Go and take word to my brothers; please note that it wasn't us who first referred to him as our brother, it was Jesus, who first said that he was our brother.

We belong to God's family as Christ's brothers and sisters; and our faith is that Jesus lives, and in a moment, and at the altar, we shall eat a meal with him in remembrance and celebration that he died, that he conquered death and that he was raised to new life, so that we who believe in him may also have eternal life in heaven with him.

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