

Sermon for Easter Sunday

One of the hard things about the isolation we are all experiencing is the isolation from family and friends. Where we would have visited -children or parents or grandparents -over the Easter holiday, that is not, now, possible. Skype and facetime are wonderful inventions but they are not the same as genuine face to face intimacy- cooking and eating with each other, & repeating old jokes and D delighting in the newness and difference of children and grandchildren And 'family' is not just blood relations. Like the Christ church 'family,' virtually gathered this morning, most of us have friends who are as close or closer than relations. They are, family too.

This year, not only may we not spend time with friends and family, but we may not worship together and receive the sacrament. Perhaps, that allows us to catch a glimpse of how it felt to the Israelites to be exiled to Babylon, or fled in fear into Egypt. To all of them, Jeremiah's promise was that one day the people would return from exile to their own country. One day they would take up their instruments and return to mount Zion in Jerusalem and worship God in the temple. And underpinning it all, the great promise, the ground of their hope was that - one day God promises, one day, God will be our God and we will be God's people.

That was the promise to the Jews in exile two and a half thousand years ago. And that promise comes to its fulfilment for all of us in the empty tomb.

'Early on the first day of the week while it was still dark Mary Magdalene came to the tomb.' It was still dark because all hope was dead. The one whom they had believed to be the way, the truth and the life had been extinguished by the corrupt power of the Roman Empire. Mary had come without hope, out of respect and love.

But something was wrong. The stone had gone. The tomb was disturbed. There was confusion and panic. She fetched Simon Peter and John and they came and looked and returned home. But Mary didn't return home.

Mary stayed at the tomb and wept; and then, we are told, she looked into the tomb and saw something different. The disciples had seen discarded grave clothes. Mary reported afterwards that she had seen two angels; one at the head and one at the feet. Unlike Simon Peter and John, her tears gave her time not just to look but really to look, and to see. And as she continued to weep, into her desolation and loss she heard a voice speaking to her. She thought it was the gardener until he said her name -'Mary'- and then she truly heard and recognised the risen Lord.

Seeing is not the same as truly seeing; hearing is not the same as truly hearing. The risen Christ showed himself to Mary as she waited in her grief before he revealed himself to Simon-Peter and to John.

The gift of faith, the gift of revelation comes to us unexpectedly and unasked for. And it comes to hearts which have made time space for it, through the emptiness of bereavement and loss and selfless love.

It wasn't just Mary to whom he revealed himself. Other women, other men, groups of them together saw and heard him. These were not credulous people. They knew as we do, that death is final. But they also came to know that for this one person death was not final. The Jesus who revealed himself was not the same as he had been before. They could see more clearly his glory as the personification of the Father.

The resurrection isn't a conjuring trick with bones. It is the pivot point of history, the moment at which God, who entered time in the incarnation, demonstrated his authority over death and time. That authority has been his always. Who made death and time but God? But in the darkness of our ignorance we had not comprehended it.

Into our darkness, just before dawn comes the realisation that the night is clearing. Death and incomprehension are vanquished. Lament can allow us to see that Christ is risen & God conquers death. The family of the church, the family of Christ, cannot be destroyed but becomes stronger with each generation.

God conquers death - and the family of the church can only grow in strength as together, in adversity, we celebrate that **Christ is risen**