

Easter Morning - 4th April 2021

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. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

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

"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. 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.'"

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

This gospel should end with the theme tune from Eastenders - doof doof...

How can Mark leave us on this cliffhanger - the women go to the tomb.. they find no body.. they meet an angel..... and then they flee.. What happens next?!!

So the earliest fragments we have of this scripture - and this is the first gospel to be written, maybe 30 years after Jesus - end here.. on this cliffhanger.. they flee, afraid.

Later on, people found it necessary to write better endings, to round things off, but that was not Mark's intention.. He wanted you to read it, and go - shock.. I need to find some Christians to tell me what this is all about! Where's the person who lent me this papyrus, I need to ask them what happens next!!

And they get to their friend, and they ask Christ is Risen? Christ is Risen indeed my friend!! Come and meet the church, receive the holy spirit, find that Jesus is still alive today!

So this is Easter! The day that He rose again - when the world changed.

And we celebrate because Jesus has not simply revived or resuscitated - he's resurrected - come back to life in a brand new way!

Jesus broke death - like the easter egg cracking open - you can't put it back together. There is no more 2nd death, no more death being the end of everything.

Jesus has made a new way - yes, he was born a human, lived a life like one of us, he shared our joys and sorrows and knows utterly what it is to be human - but now.. he's

gone on, he's on a path untrodden by any human, he is the first born of God's new creation.

And he is recognisable to us and the disciples, but beyond our imagining.

We're like caterpillars, meeting a butterfly - and we recognise that they used to be like us, but we struggle to imagine how our earth bound bodies could ever do that.

Here is the risen Jesus, able to eat and drink, like us. Flesh and blood like us. Yet he can appear and disappear through locked doors, and can even keep people from recognising him until he breaks the bread.

But the risen Jesus, this butterfly, is the future for all of us, who are still caterpillars.

Believe it or not - we shall be changed, as we say at funeral services, *he will transform our frail bodies, that they may conformed to his glorious body.* We will be like him!

Why?

Because this is what God is all about!

God is not about judging people for right and wrong, or shunning them when they have fears or doubts. God is not trying to set some divine taskmaster - or puzzle, that if we can keep all the rules, and dodge the traps, then we might make it.

God is simply a single minded, utterly committed, bundle of fluffy love.

He did not "take time out" of his busy schedule, to come and rescue humanity. He was not busy elsewhere spinning galaxies and filling black holes when he got interrupted to deal with sin.

His one desire, his whole DNA, his complete attention - is on us. You. And me. He only wants to be with us, he longs to be with us, for us to be with him, completely and forever.

That's what this is all about - that we are so worth it, to him. He didn't have any other plans, he wasn't busy somewhere else - he was always there - trying to reach us.

And now, now that Jesus has shown us to what lengths he will go to be with us, now that Jesus has broken death and the barriers between us - and now he has a new way of living, there is a way for all of us, every one of us, to be with God for ever.

And all are invited, make no mistake, there's no exclusion or inequality in God's kingdom - women are equal to men, black is equal to white, any gender or sexuality, all are invited and utterly welcome.

And any who respond - they're called - The Church! Its a funny name, for a funny group of people! All sorts, odd sorts, good and bad - really annoying and some quite fun - that's us!!

The ones who've said YES to this invitation from God.

Here, not because we chose each other, but because God put us together, like a team. Each with a position to play (I think that's how sport works?!).

And its really good to be back in this building - because it means I can use the building as a visual aid! Look up! The roof is like the hull of a giant boat. We are in the ship - we are the crew, crossing the stormy seas of this world's tribulations. Whatever happens - I nearly mentioned the "thing" - God has us safe, in his boat, in his hands, and we have each other. We are connected, we are family.

And you who are not in the building - you are in the church too!! I can't do the metaphor - maybe you're smaller life boats - helping to rescue others and offer the invitation of God... But you're with us too - part of the team.

And ships are built for a purpose, and teams are put together to do things. And God's church, Jesus's family - we have a purpose too.

We are not about looking inwards, holy huddles, and making sure we've got enough... We are here to change the world. Its a bit megalomaniac isn't it - but its true.

Jesus showed us and taught us a new way to live -
With openness and generosity, with care for the least, the poorest, the unlovely,
To work for justice and equality, to bring understanding, to fight prejudice,
To bring joy where there is none, reconciliation and peace where there is division.

That's world changing alright. Because those jobs will keep us busy for a long while yet!

But God's plan was that it would start really small - just a handful of men and women. But that if they started living like that, it would ripple out and change everything.

It might start as small as a small chocolate egg on a doorstep, or a casual remark - oh I'll pray for you, or simply your signature signing a petition for climate change - but it will spread...

Just like the crack in the egg - there's no going back - through the broken tomb of Jesus, light and life will spread, from Jerusalem to Judea, to Rome and Samaria, and all the ends of the earth.

Right here and now, with you and me, in Alderholt.

For God dwells with humanity, and he will never leave us!
Christ is Risen, He is Risen indeed!!