

SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND JONATHAN ANDREW
AT 7AM SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION ON 21 APRIL 2019 – EASTER DAY

Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Luke 24:1-12

“When they did not find the body, they were perplexed, terrified, amazed.”

So as that Sunday morning was dawning, as on all Sunday mornings, human beings were going about their business as usual. Even those who had been with Jesus and had heard his words were doing the usual thing. The momentous turning point in history found men and women doing what they'd always done. The women, as women had done for generations, went to tend to the dead with spices and anointing. The men, as men always do, didn't believe the women when they came rushing back with silly news.

Well, naturally - when they get to the gravesite, neither the women nor the men can believe what has happened. The stone's rolled away, and there's no body. How can this be? Has the body been stolen? Does a dead body just get up and leave? With hindsight we might want to criticise those Easter morning witnesses for their unbelief - had they heard nothing that Jesus had been saying? But would we have reacted any differently? Jesus himself told them that he would rise again, but their (and our) 'business as usual' experience and mindset block out the evidence of our own eyes.

“They were perplexed, terrified, amazed”, and that was only natural because something very strange had happened, and it took time to make sense of it. Indeed, the passage we've just read leaves us hanging – the tomb is empty, but no sign yet of the risen Christ. And the next part of Luke's gospel starts equally mysteriously – two disciples meet the stranger on the road to Emmaus, and it's only after they've been together for several hours that they recognise Jesus in the breaking of bread at supper.

And if we look across all the gospels we read of a range of different experiences of the risen Christ:

- Some very personal – Mary Magdalene recognising the gardener as Jesus when he calls her by name, or Thomas invited to touch Christ's wounds.
- Some very public – Paul intriguingly speaks of Jesus appearing to over 500 followers all at one go.
- Some very supernatural – with Jesus passing through locked doors and appearing and disappearing at will.
- Some cataclysmic – as when Paul's whole life is overturned in a blinding flash on the Damascus road.
- Some prosaic – as when Jesus prepares a breakfast of barbecued fish for the disciples on the lake shore.

But over time, as they share these experiences with one another, the truth begins to dawn on the disciples. What Jesus had said, was what he actually meant – death could not hold him – he was alive, and alive in a sense that was freer and more powerful than anyone in a mere earthly body could experience.

And so as we each think about the Easter story, perhaps we should reflect on our own journey of faith:

- Some, like Mary Magdalene, Paul and Thomas, may once in their life have felt a very strong personal calling, or a feeling of being born again.
- Some, like those 500 disciples may have felt part of a mass conversion experience.
- For some, there may have been no once off event, but a gradual process of realisation built up over years of study, prayer and discipline that that is just how things are – Jesus is still alive and there for us.
- Some, like those disciples on the Emmaus Road, may feel they are closest to Christ when the word is preached, and bread and wine broken in the Holy Communion.

But by whatever route we came, here we are this morning, able to celebrate and shout with joy “He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

Amen