

## Easter day reflection – 12<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Readings: Acts 10.24-43; John 20.1-18

Shortly after the coronavirus lockdown came into effect, somebody posted this on Twitter: *The first Easter didn't happen at a church. It happened outside of an empty tomb, while all the disciples were sequestered in a home, grief-stricken and wondering what was going on. So, we're all going to be keeping things pretty biblical this Easter.*

For most of us, this is a very strange Easter day. Easter services are usually the occasion for the church to gather in joy and celebration of the amazing and mind-boggling truth that lies at the heart of Christian faith – that Jesus Christ is risen today; that Jesus Christ has burst the bonds of death, the chains that could not hold him, and opened the way for all humanity, and all creation into new life. And that's a wonderful thing to celebrate, and a real reason for joy. But perhaps in those usual celebrations, it's easy for us to overlook the essential strangeness and incomprehensibility of Easter Day.

Although the gospel accounts of the resurrection vary slightly, they have features in common. In all four, it's one or more women who come to the tomb, early in the morning. On Friday, they saw their leader, their teacher, their friend, tortured and killed in the worst possible way. In the circumstances, the arrangements for dealing with his body are of necessity hurried and perfunctory. The requirements of their faith, the observance of Sabbath, requires them to put everything on hold – what in other times and circumstances they do in the usual way to honour their friend and cope with their own grief. Throughout that Saturday they have no choice but to sit with their sorrow – to endure the emptiness. To grapple not only with their personal loss, but the loss of all their hopes and dreams. The one that they hoped might be Messiah is dead. And for them, a dead Messiah is by definition a failed Messiah. For more than 24 hours, they are stuck on the hamster wheel of grief and loss, unable to release their sorrow in any kind of action.

Only once the Sabbath is past are they released – to hurry at the earliest opportunity back to the place where they last saw the man they loved as Lord and master. And when they get there, things are not as they expect. The tomb that was sealed by a stone on Friday is once again open. There is no body inside. It's empty. What is going on? What has happened? In John's account, Mary

takes the news of the empty tomb to Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. They check out what she's told them for themselves, and then return home, leaving Mary weeping at the tomb. The first people to encounter the reality of the resurrection – the empty tomb – react, not with joy and understanding, but with sorrow and bewilderment.

Crisis and tragedy shake us to our core. They force us to reevaluate everything we think we know and understand. They often require us to make changes, in order to find a new way forward. And that's the effect Jesus's death and resurrection had on his followers - and it took time for them to grasp the real and full significance of what happened on that first Easter morning 2,000 years ago. It took time for them to work out what it meant – for them, and for the whole world. The world is currently experiencing a crisis (albeit of a very different kind) with the coronavirus pandemic. But what we learn from the resurrection accounts is that fear, sorrow and bewilderment are normal reactions to crisis – but that they do not have to have the last word. When the world changes, it is not necessarily for the worse. Crisis poses the question: what have we learned through these strange and uncomfortable experiences? And what kind of world do we want to build, on the other side? What good has come out of these circumstances, and what can we learn and keep from it?

The resurrection of Jesus is good news. Whatever our frailties and failures, nothing can undo or set aside what Jesus's faithful, committed love has done for us. God's love and desire to renew the whole of creation is stronger than human sin and weakness. Two thousand years ago, something cosmic happened, and Jesus opened up a new future for all humanity and all creation. Nothing can change that. Today, Easter Day 2020, may you be filled afresh with resurrection joy, faith, hope and love. God bless you.