



1 April 2018 – Easter Day
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
The Gospel of Mark 16 1-8
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

'Alleluia! Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia!'

It's not often that the congregation is given the opportunity to preach but today, my Easter gift to you all is that you get to deliver the punchline! [as printed above]. We have already spoken these words earlier in the service and when the time comes, I'd like you to belt it out without reservation. But, for now, here's the preamble.

After the crucifixion, Jesus' mother Mary no longer features in the Bible. His last request from the cross to John was that he care for Mary, so we imagine that she has now gone to live with John. We can only speculate at how exhausted she must have been or, as Prince Charles put it so movingly in his Easter message, '... the torment of grief she endured', after witnessing the harrowing death of her dear son. Once the Sabbath was over it was, therefore, left to the other two Mary's who were also present at the crucifixion together with Salome, to complete the ritual of burial. They go and buy spices to anoint the body. And that's the whole point! They are expecting to find a body.

They talk as they walk expressing anxiety that they will not be able to roll back the heavy tombstone from its entrance. On arriving anxiety turns to alarm when they find the tomb is open. Inside an, other-worldly, young man calmly awaits their arrival. "Don't worry Jesus isn't here, he's risen, look! That's where he was laid but now he's gone on ahead of you. Go and tell the disciples especially Peter." Now, the women are more than alarmed, they are terrified and flee saying nothing to anyone, as they run home.

We've heard the account of the resurrection so often that we can forget for these women it's a total revelation. "Is it really true? He's alive? He said he would rise from the dead but we didn't believe him!" The shock of the truth dawns on them.

In the original manuscript, Mark's gospel ends there not telling us what happened next. Was the ending damaged or lost or does Mark want us to join up the dots with our own faith? One thing is certain, if Jesus had not been raised from the dead no one would have heard of him. He would have just been one more good man who became a casualty of the Roman Empire and an antagonistic religious authority.

The women begin to come to terms with the seemingly impossible. Their beloved leader killed so brutally, now lives! No one could have that much control over death back to life except God. Jesus must be God incarnate and they have seen God and lived! The whole order of life and faith changes from that moment. To keep company with Jesus is to live. God's love has provided the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. And

this has been revealed to these women first. They are to be the first Apostles to go and tell this good news and share it with the disciples. I wonder what was Peter's reaction? "And Peter, we were told that we had to tell you especially!" In his resurrection, Christ raises Peter from the ashes of his betrayal and transforms him to new life.

Peter, unlike Judas, had understood the transformative grace of repentance and forgiveness through the power of the cross and the empty tomb. His reflections of the last few days will have caused him to ponder on the personal death of corrosive, decaying guilt that sin creates in our lives and its repercussions. All has been shown in the pains that Jesus bore for us of the desertion and desolation; the torments of the trial; the agony on the cross. And then, the anxiety, alarm and exhausted grief of those who were left seemingly bereft of God.

We're all like Peter, in our own way, but the cross of Christ and the empty tomb stand forever as the promise that no matter whether we disown Christ, his love is willing to forgive repentant hearts with joy and welcome us back. So, what are we waiting for? Are we ready to go and tell?

So, here's the punchline, let's shout it out!

Alleluia! Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Reference material

*HRH Prince of Wales Easter message <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43584997>