

EASTER MESSAGE 2021. Mark 16v1-8The Significance of the Resurrection.

Two questions: Did it happen? Does it matter? The Evidence for the Resurrection and the Significance of the Resurrection.

Introduction: What hope can we give people who have lost loved ones during the Covid 19 Pandemic. 354 in North Somerset area. Nurse Jane – 3 months on Covid Ward. Only nurse NOT to have contracted Covid! Where does our hope lie? Science, vaccine, PPE, Social distancing or what? Friend Peter Hart, 6ft4in Paramedic lost his life in May 2020 on his 52nd birthday. Son Daniel is now a doctor and daughter Lauren works on Breakfast TV with Philip Schofield and Holly....

Imagine the scene very early on Sunday morning in Jerusalem. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses and Salome, who had been last at the tomb with Joseph (and Nicodemus the Pharisee who came to see Jesus at night and was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council), are struggling with a heavy load of spices to come and anoint the body of Jesus. It was the night before, after sundown when the Sabbath ended, that they went out to buy the spices. Jews count days from sundown to sundown. It is now the third day since Jesus had died around 3pm on the day before the Sabbath began. It only took Jesus about 6 hours on the cross to die and his legs were not broken, but his side was pierced. Blood and water flowed to show that he was already fully dead. How do you think they were feeling? Sad, lonely, disappointed, heart-broken, anxious... they were bereaved, of course.

In the early morning light, just after sunrise, so maybe 6am ish? They were **PILGRIMS** on the way to the tomb. But they had not thought about the guards, the roman wax seal on the heavy stone in front of the tomb. They just thought this was the thing to do. Pay their last respects, like we do on Remembrance day perhaps... honour the dead and their sacrifice for us.

Grief is a journey and takes time. I was speaking to someone this week who lost a son 19 years ago. Do you ever get over that loss. No, it will always be with you but the pain recedes. My own mother lost two of her 4

brothers – one to suicide and one to friendly fire in his Hurricane plane over Malta in WWII. She refused to have a gas oven in our home! I am sure that she carried that pain to her dying days a few years ago in Bristol. But the grieving do not want to be avoided. It is good to speak about their loved one and just say ‘I am so sorry for your loss’. Nothing more is needed.

However, something more was about to happen to these three courageous and faithful women. They arrived at the Tomb to find that the stone was rolled away and they entered the tomb straight away. No guards to be seen (they had left to report the earthquake and moving of the stone). But the women saw a young man in white – an angel messenger from God. They were **SEEKERS**. Seeking the body of Jesus to care for it. But they met an Angel of God. What are angels? They are indeed part of the heavenly host of those who serve and worship God and do His bidding. Some entertain angels unawares, like Abraham did when he gave hospitality to three men and two of them then went to rescue Lot and his family from Sodom. Angels are God’s messengers and often come to serve His people on earth. There were many angelic visitations at the time of Jesus birth, you may remember and so also at the time of his death. Before Pilate he said that he could have called upon 12,000 angels to come and deliver him, but it was not God’s will. Angels strengthened him after his battle with Satan in the wilderness and again in the Garden of Gethsemane. Now, an angel tells the women what has happened to Jesus and what to do next.

But how do they respond? Like all humans in the presence of the supernatural – they are alarmed, fearful and afraid. Same was true of the shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem, Zechariah in the temple, Mary in Nazareth, John on the Isle of Patmos...

We can distinguish between a healthy fear of God, which is honour and respect for Him and is the beginning of wisdom from a terror and fear that cripples and paralyzes us into inaction.

'You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.' V6

We cannot come to Easter Sunday and the Empty Tomb without going through the whole events of Holy Week. So glad for the reminders from Palm Sunday to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Silent Saturday and now Easter Day, the Day of Resurrection.

Remember that it was all foretold by Jesus and the prophets from Genesis to Malachi in the Scriptures. Paul has reminded us of the essential of the Good News: 'Christ has died for our sins..., that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.' 1 Cor.15v3,4
We covered some of those scriptures in the Drama (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53)

It is good for us to be **SEEKERS** as well as **PILGRIMS**, on our way to become followers of Jesus. But that was not the end for these women, they would now have a job to do. They would become **WITNESSES**, or as some say **APOSTLES** to the APOSTLES. Apostle is a sent one. The first apostles were women!! But they became fearful and the men found it hard to believe at first until several others had encounters with the risen Lord Jesus and he even later on that same day met them in the locked upper room, as John's Gospel and Luke's gospel accounts remind us.

'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.' V7

GO & TELL – that is the work of a witness, an apostle.

Peter – the one who had denied Jesus three times. Mark maybe received his account of the life and teachings of Jesus from Peter, so it was so important that he was restored and would become the Rock, Cephas, the one who would with the Apostle Paul become the key apostles to tell the good news to Jews and Gentiles. Jesus had not forgotten Peter and he has not forgotten you.

What was there message to be? *Jesus is alive, you will see him again in Galilee, remember his promises.*

Bishop Peter's Easter message concludes with Three Points to apply for us all today: **Joy, Peace and Purpose**. I have taken the same ones!

JOY – Easter IS a time for Joy. There is hope. Death is not the end. The best is yet to come. Let's celebrate with God's people worldwide. Jesus came to bring LIFE, in all its fulness, but overcoming the 'thief, who only comes to steal, kill and destroy' John 10v10

PEACE – Yes, we can have true peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our peace. He has died for our sins AND risen to show that His sacrifice 'Once for All' has been accepted by the Father. Shalom is possible with God and with everyone else. He is the Source of true Wholeness of body, mind and spirit. In our world of METOO, mental health issues affect so many, but the Living Lord Jesus is the true source of shalom, peace.

PURPOSE – Yes, there is a purpose and point to our lives. We are all loved by God and He has a plan for our lives. Our purpose it to KNOW God, to GLORIFY God and to ENJOY Him forever.

I love this quote from the Last Battle, by CS Lewis as he concludes his Narnia Chronicles.

p.172 'Then Aslan turned to them and said:

'You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be.'

Lucy said, *'We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often.'*

'No fear of that.' said Aslan. *'Have you not guessed?'*

Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them. *'There was a **real** railway accident,'* said Aslan softly. *'Your father and mother and all of you are - as you used to call it in Shadowlands - dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.'*

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before. Let us pray.