**Talk for Easter Sunday 2020**

Mandy Hewson 12th April 2020

**1St reading from Matthew 29: 1-10 read to us by Evelyn**

* *send children out on their activity…*

There’s never been an Easter Day quite like this… I’m preaching to you from my study at home because of the pandemic, and you are watching or reading from your own …its strange not to be together in person celebrating Easter – but perhaps this gives us just a taster of what it must be like for millions of our brothers and sisters across the world, who have never met together- and instead live in fear of their love of Christ being found out.

And it perhaps gives us a taster of what it means for those in our community who cannot - for many reasons -leave their homes to join in with our worship….

However we meet- in person or otherwise – today is a day to be glad! A joyful day when we remember and celebrate that Jesus rose from the dead.

And yet if we look back at the gospels we can see that it certainly didn’t start that way for the disciples and followers of Jesus.

This week, I have been reading across all four gospel accounts of Jesus’ arrest, to better understand what happened to his friends after their shared meal, on what we call Maundy Thursday…. And sadly it seems to show that instead of the disciples remaining close together and supporting one another, they became a fragmented group… For example, two gospel accounts (Matthew and Mark) tell us that after the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Three of the gospels infer that only women witnessed his crucifixion (John, Matthew & Mark), whilst one records John as being there. (John 19:26).

Instead of the disciples, it was Joseph of Arimathea who claimed his body. And who, with the help of Nicodemus, placed Jesus in a tomb (John 19:38), whilst women watched to see where they put him (Luke 23:55).

In many ways we can understand the disciples’ response. Their grief lay heavily. They were fearful of possible repercussions on behalf of the authorities. Their expectations were crushed - and I imagine that they just didn’t know what to do with themselves.

Even on the morning of Sunday, the first day they could approach the tomb because of the Sabbath, it was women who went there and who went on to share the news with Peter and John. When Jesus appeared to the disciples - Thomas wasn’t there, and we know that two of his followers had already decided to return to their home town and were met by Jesus as they walked the road to Emmaus.

This sounds like a woeful story doesn’t it? But I have good and glorious news! Because the wonder of the Resurrection changed all that! It united the followers of Jesus in a profound way. His presence among them inspired hope and deepened their faith - And in time - each would find a way to live out their renewed trust in Jesus…

Across the denominations, Christians know Jesus as the Risen Lord, and this truth unites us despite our differences in other areas. The Resurrection gathers us together because it speaks profoundly of God’s sacrificial love and his commitment to all humanity for all time.

**Let’s hear our second reading Acts 10: 34-43. (read by Poppy)**

So here is impetuous Peter, the practical one, who denied Jesus three times and received full forgiveness. Here we hear him speak with eloquence because the resurrection has changed him deeply, and made him more aware of God’s guiding hand on his life, through his Holy Spirit. This reading is part of the larger story of Peter’s vision and meeting with Cornelius, and in it, Peter is challenged to recognise that everyone has value in God’s eyes and that Jesus is Lord of all, not a select group.

**Play advert**…NOT ENDORSED BY ME.. (taken from indeed Nasa ad). *For those who are reading or listening rather than watching, this advert shows us an astronaut in space and then cuts to the communications centre in Nasa where people are working to keep him safe and bring him home. And in the background, quietly working is a cleaner, who is picking up the paper thrown to the floor by the communications team.*

So here we see different people each at work. And there is dependence one on another. The Astronaut can’t manage his space craft alone, and the communications team are dependent on the cleaner who ensures that they continue to have enough space to work in and don’t trip up on the paper thrown haphazardly on the floor. And behind the scenes there would also have been scientists, mathematicians, catering staff and many more who wouldn’t have the glory of actual contact with the space-craft but would nevertheless be essential to the well- being of the crew and the outcome of the mission.

If there is one thing that this time of lockdown is teaching us, its that everyone has a part to play and that those whose tasks are often viewed as menial are actually those on whom we rely the most. The refuge collectors, truck drivers, shop-staff. People who work in warehouses sorting out our deliveries, and those who bring us our post. Carers in nursing homes, and people who work in the labs of hospitals. Nurses of all grades, doctors, and those working for charities such as the Foodbank who are committed to helping the most vulnerable and isolated.

We have a great deal to be thankful for, and need to think with care about how we continue to truly value these members of our society when the pandemic has passed….

Our reading reminds us that God is not partial. He wants everyone to hear the gospel message because everyone of any age, gender of nationality is important to him. He values everyone, and I believe that he calls us to do the same.

In the account of Jesus’ suffering on the cross and his resurrection we can see God in action. And the greatest news is that he continues to be active today… by His Holy Spirit he is working in the world for good and calls us to be a part of this – both as individuals, and as a people united together.

And so - as we gather - in our hearts and minds - around the Cross, let’s remember that the resurrection speaks of the love, hope, peace, forgiveness and eternal life that are found in our Risen Lord. In this time of crisis we need to claim this for ourselves afresh - and share it both in word and in action.

**For Jesus is indeed Lord of All! Hallelujah!**