

Sermon – Sunday 21st April – 6 am

Luke is a wonderful storyteller. We've just heard his version of that first Easter morning, and it is told in such detail that it's almost like being there. We can see the events unfold and have a tangible sense of the feelings of each character.

Luke's focus is always on the people who are on the edges. He stands up for the poor, and women play a big part in his gospel – no more so than here. I wonder what it was like for those women? Just imagine for a moment. They had watched Jesus crucified and laid in a tomb. And then they had waited, unable to do anything on the Sabbath. That must have been such a long day, so much so that it was early dawn when they made their way to the tomb with the spices they had prepared on the Friday.

What might have been going through their heads on that Saturday? They knew what they wanted to do – they wanted to honour Jesus. To do the only thing left to them, tending his body with ointments and spices. They had 24 hours for the events of Good Friday – and the preceding years – to go round in their heads. There is a solemnity with which they approached their task, and also a sense of purpose. A sense of knowing what they can do.

Yet nothing is as they expect.

I want us to focus on this most extraordinary part of the story, because somehow it can encapsulate so much that is important in our attempts to be followers of Christ. I want us to focus most specifically on three key things that happen. The first is that the women are perplexed; the second is that they are encouraged to remember what Jesus told them; and the third is that they go and tell the eleven.

It's gloriously simple, and yet surprisingly profound. The women had expected to get to the tomb and find Jesus's body to anoint. Instead they discovered the stone rolled away and an empty tomb. To say that they were perplexed is probably an understatement, especially when the next events play out.

At this point they are subjected to a terrifying encounter with two men in dazzling clothes, who tell them that Jesus is risen, and encourage them to remember what Jesus had told them while he was still with them – that he would be crucified and on the third day rise again.

There is something in the way Luke narrates these events which leads us to almost feel the sense of realisation as the women take in what they are being told. As they recall what Jesus said over and over while he was alive, and begin to appreciate its magnitude – and indeed how it has been fulfilled.

And their immediate response is to go and tell the others – to head straight to the eleven remaining disciples and tell them what they have discovered.

What an extraordinary pattern that could be for a life of faith. The women were perplexed – and surely they had cause to be, finding an empty tomb only just after they have seen Jesus's crucified body laid in it. But being perplexed is reasonably common in a life of faith. We all have questions, don't we? There are things that we can't explain. We believe that this world is God's creation,

sustained by God's love – and it is, indeed, beautiful. Yet there is ugliness, too. Much of our lives are spent trying to make sense of complexities in the world; in ourselves; in our relationships.

And what I want to suggest is that being perplexed lies at the heart of our faith. It isn't the end point, but neither is it something to fear. If we have questions and are confused, we have somewhere to start.

If we follow the pattern of those perplexed women at the empty tomb, it was at this point that they were encouraged to remember what Jesus had told them. Two things strike me here. The first is how often we need companions in our faith – people who point us in the right direction. And the second is just how important it is to remember the depth contained within the scriptures. However many times we think we have read stories from the Bible, we can still find ourselves reading them afresh. And they can still have something new to say. It really is surprising how often we can find Jesus speaking right into situations we are facing if only we will take the time to listen – through prayer; reading the scriptures; hearing the voice of wise friends.

And once we have remembered, once we have discovered anew the truth of God's love, we really do need to share that with others. Like the women did, by going and speaking to the disciples. Or perhaps through our own actions, sharing God's love through what we do.

So I want to say “be perplexed” – there's no shame in asking questions; then remember what Jesus is telling you; and go and share the good news.

Of course there is a particular encouragement to this story, and most especially to those of us who can find it hard to share the good news. After all that they encountered, the women were met, quite literally, with disbelief. What a wonderful phrase Luke uses: “these words seemed to them (the disciples) an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

And if we ever feel like that ourselves, take heart, because that isn't the end of the story. He may not have believed them, but Peter ran to the tomb nevertheless, stooped, looked in, saw the linen cloths and went home amazed.

Our faith matters. Our discipleship matters. Even when it seems to fall on deaf ears, there is still hope. Jesus did rise from the dead. Those who doubt can find faith. God's love really is that big.

Amen