

Sermon – Sunday 21st April 2019 – 9.30 am

So, it's Easter morning. Let's face it, it doesn't get much better than that in church, does it? Let's just remind ourselves. The response, in case you've forgotten, is "He is risen indeed, Alleluia!"

So, Alleluia, Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia.

Excellent. But I've got even better news. And it's this. The Easter story is for everyone. Yes, you heard me. It's for everyone. Now of course you're very wise people, so you knew that already, but it's still a really important part of today. And there's a good reason why I know it's true. The Easter story is for everyone.

We've just heard John's version of the events of the very first Easter morning. I want to focus on the characters of John, Peter and Mary to show you that Easter is for everyone.

Let's start with John. Now, we don't know whether John, the disciple who Jesus loved, is the same John to whom this gospel is attributed, but, let's be honest, he's just a little bit full of himself. I imagine that when he was with the other disciples he didn't keep reminding them that he was the one whom Jesus loved because he would probably have ended up with not a few black eyes. But throughout this gospel, he is forever reminding us, the readers.

The gospel tells us that Mary Magdalene was the first to get to the tomb, and, finding that the stone had been removed, she ran to tell Peter and John. And Peter and John ran to the tomb. Do you notice, once again, the tiny detail? It was the disciple whom Jesus loved who got there first. He just can't let it go, can he? Especially as Mary was actually first there, if we're going to be entirely accurate.

And then we hear that most wonderful line. That John went into the tomb after Peter. And that he saw and believed. We'll come back to that point later. But for now what we can say is that even if we're inclined to be a little bit full of ourselves sometimes, Easter is for us. Which might be pretty good news for many of us.

So what about Peter? Well, we know quite a lot about impetuous Peter already, don't we? I think many of us find him a reassuring character, because just at the moment that he seems to get something right, he goes and puts his great size nines right in it. And of course when Jesus most needed him, he betrayed him – something that he will be reminded of right at the end of John's gospel, when Jesus asks him if he loves him three times over.

At this stage, we don't really know what Peter makes of the events that unfold. He, like John, is approached by Mary and told that the stone has been removed from the tomb. So he runs over there – a little slower than John, but nevertheless presumably at a creditable pace. And, impetuous as ever, he is the first to enter the tomb, finding the linen wrappings and cloth, but no Jesus.

The gospel writer tells us that "they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead" and the implication is that this statement applies to Peter at this point. As he returns to his home, he doesn't understand what he has experienced. Not yet. And yet there is no doubt that Easter is for people like Peter. So if you're a bit impetuous; put your foot in it sometimes; perhaps have great passion and commitment, even if it does occasionally take you in the wrong directions

Peter's presence on Easter morning should be very reassuring indeed. Easter is definitely for you, too.

And what of Mary Magdalene? She was the first at the tomb, and as soon as she discovered that the stone had been removed, she went to tell Peter and John. I wonder why? Did she recognise how little status women had? Was she scared or unsure? Did she need reassurance that she was not mistaken?

If those feelings resonate for you, if you ever doubt yourself, doubt your faith, need a bit of reassurance, then there's very good news. Because Easter is for you, too. Having made an appearance right at the beginning of today's reading, Mary disappears in the frantic rush between Peter and John to get to the tomb. But once they have gone home, she reappears – indeed, she had never gone away, just hadn't been noticed in the hiatus. And when we see her, she is crying. First she sees two angels who ask why she is crying, and then she has an encounter with Jesus himself. At first she thinks he is the gardener, but then she recognises him. And he takes the time to explain to her that she must not hold onto him, because he will not be around in this resurrected form forever. This is enough for her to proclaim that she has seen the Lord.

So, whether you are a bit big-headed like John; a hot-head like Peter; or a little unsure of yourself like Mary, Easter is for you. And of course even if you aren't like any of those stereotypes – or indeed contain a little of each of them – Easter is for you, too.

And the reason is because of the nature of God. The resurrection shows us something extraordinary about God. It shows us the power and strength of God's love. It shows us that God's love will always overcome hate. It shows us that even death cannot defeat God – life will always be stronger. There will always be light in the world. Darkness will never overcome it.

So while John may indeed have been a bit big-headed; wanted to suggest that Jesus loved him the most; made it very clear that he beat Peter in the race to the tomb; there is no doubt at all for him but that Jesus is of a different nature. When he goes into the tomb, he sees that it is empty, and he believes. He knows something that transcends his own big-headedness – that matters more.

Peter's moment will come later, but already he is being confronted with his own betrayal. He is putting together the pieces and knows that his life will never be the same again. That even though he is impetuous and passionate, his gifts can and will be used by God.

And Mary, too, knows that she has been changed forever. Her encounter with the risen Jesus emboldens her to proclaim that she has seen the Lord. She needed that personal touch – and Jesus knew it. But with encouragement she realises that she must manage without his physical presence. And she knows that she can.

Easter is for everyone. And that's because God knows each one of us inside out. It's because God loves each one of us. And it's because God knows that if we can only believe that just a little bit, our lives really will be transformed.

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed, alleluia!