

Bennochy church: 1st April 2018

We all like a good story. Even if it is a story where we know the ending. There are films, that I have watched over and over again, but I will still watch them. There are bits I will have missed, but I will still watch it to the end, even though I know what happens. I do this because, for me, it is a good story. I want you to tell the person next to you, your favourite film and one sentence why you like it so much. *PAUSE*. I suspect, even though you have seen it many times. Next time it is on the TV, you might still watch it.

In the final chapter of the Gospel of Mark, the earliest written account of the gospel stories, Mark says, early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women arrive at the tomb of Jesus and find the stone rolled away. That should have got some alarm bells ringing! They enter the tomb to find a young man sitting inside. What they do not see is the body of Jesus. And the young man says to them: *“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you”* (Mark 16:6-7 ESV).

I think they were alarmed. Trying to piece this puzzle together. What has happened here? Who is this guy and more importantly, where is the body of Jesus?

Two Interesting things in this story. First of all, in their male dominated society, this is a revelation to women. Two thousand years ago, that is some statement to make. Secondly, he says to them, they were to tell the disciples, and Peter. He includes the man who had denied Jesus three times. He is singled out. Peter probably still smarting with embarrassment, is here given a special inclusion.

This is a story about the one who goes ahead. Jesus, man of miracles, who healed the sick, fed the crowds and calmed the waves; Jesus, man of words, who taught his followers in parables and spoke with authority; Jesus, author of faith and hope, who demonstrated the true nature of love. This same man, Jesus of Nazareth, now risen, will go ahead of his followers to Galilee, where it all began.

The same resurrected Jesus calls us and says, my cross, pick it up, feel its weight and then, and only then, come follow me. Jesus has gone ahead of us. Outpacing us, and calling us into God's new future. The point of the story of Easter is not to linger at a tomb that is now empty. We can pause for a moment, look in and then we must move on.

Crucifixion is passed. We will remember that story again, but for now, the point is to go; to go faithfully forward, to head in the

direction that the risen Christ is leading. Risen, Jesus is now leading us into a future that only God dreams possible.

In *"The Trial of Jesus,"* an old play by John Masefield, the centurion who oversaw Jesus' crucifixion reports back to Pilate. Pilate's wife asks the centurion to tell her about Jesus' death. After hearing his description, she asks, "Do you think he's dead?" "No, my lady, he replies. "He's been let loose in the world where neither Roman nor Jew can stop his truth."

This Easter story that claims us, tells us that the risen Christ is out ahead of us, let loose in the world, and nothing can stop his truth. That is faith. That is hope. Jesus leads us into a future within and beyond this world of pain, prejudice and poverty. Jesus goes ahead of us into a future, that cannot be defined by death or grief or loss. Jesus goes before us into a future of peace and love, justice and truth, restoration and reconciliation. Jesus goes ahead. We are called to follow. Jesus goes ahead. We are called to serve.

John's gospel gives us a different angle on the story. It starts in the same way. Mary Magdalene discovers the rolled away stone. But it is Peter, and an unnamed disciple who enter the tomb. John obviously thought this was man's work! For once Peter is not first to arrive, but it is the intrepid Peter who is first to enter the tomb. In this story he is no add on to the list. He is straight in!

I don't think John is quite sure how to end this part of the story. He simply says, the disciples went home. As you would, after such a discovery.

Mary Magdalene is left. She is distraught. She has an encounter with angels. Not, an important part of this story. She turns round, and there is a man there. Thinking it was the gardener, she asks, if you have taken him, where is he? I'm not sure why Mary would think a gardener would have the body. In such circumstances, we grasp at straws

What is interesting here, is that Jesus name is not mentioned. Recognition comes in his voice. He only has to say her name and Mary knows who it is. We could speculate as to why Mary does recognise her own close friend. It is not important. At Easter, everything changed.

At Easter, each of us stands by the tomb of Christ. Jesus is there. He calls us by name, and recognition is given by faith. A more powerful faith, than that of Thomas, who was given the privilege of touching the wounds of Christ. As we respond to Jesus, his touch upon our lives, is the touch of his spirit alone.

Mary, then went and told the disciples all she had heard and seen. We say to the world. *Jesus is risen - he is risen indeed!*
Amen.