

Easter Day 2010: St Michael's and All Angels, Hall

Acts 10:34-43; Hymn to the Risen Christ; John 20:1-18

He is Risen!

What does this mean for us today?

It means we can have a relationship with the living God.

As I have just returned from my first visit to Japan, I have been thinking about what this means, in a different way. I had so many conversations in Japan, with people wanting to know how can you have a relationship with God?

Our book translated into Japanese speaks of that journey with God, even into Alzheimer's disease. For Japanese people their gods are many, but knowing a living god is not part of their experience at all, at least for the majority of them.

Some who have been to a religious school (I think mostly Catholic) they have simply taken part of Christianity on board with their other religions, but mostly from a point of view of having the festivals of Christianity, not the relationship with God, through Jesus.

In Japan the people go to the Shinto Shrine to hope for good fortune in the following year, you can have your fortune read; you can write out wishes and prayers and leave these on pieces of wood at the Shrine. Rituals are important to them, as to all people.

Outside of the shrine, there is little; certainly not the knowledge of God who gave his Son to be crucified on the cross, for our sins. The God who raised Jesus from the dead again so that we might live in relation with him, forever. Both in this life and the life to come.

How does one respond, when hearing the story of the resurrection for the very first time? It has become so familiar for us, we celebrate it each Easter Day, and we live with that knowledge every day.

The story of the man who was shocked when realizing that the relationship that I had as a spiritual guide with Christine Bryden, a woman with dementia, was a relationship between Christine and I with God as part of that relationship. He saw that relationship as a healing

one. He told me he was shocked as he realized that he did not have God in his life.

These questions, and the realisation that so many people did not know what it could be like to worship the living God have brought new meaning to Easter for me this year.

Let's contemplate this good news of Jesus Christ, as if for the first time.

The telling of a most amazing event.

The reading from John's gospel is a central component of Christian belief. It is witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

It tells the story of Mary Magdalene going to the tomb, where Jesus had been laid on Good Friday. Now, it is early in the morning, on the first day of the week.

She sees that the large stone that had been placed across the entrance to the tomb had been removed, so without waiting to go in, she ran to tell Simon Peter and the other disciples. She had come to the conclusion that "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have laid him."

At her words, Peter and the other disciple, (not named, but most likely to be John, the writer of the Gospel), ran to the tomb. The other disciple arrived first and looked in but did not go into the tomb, until Peter arrived.

Peter went in first. He saw: "the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head rolled up in a place by itself." Then the other disciple, we are told: "also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead." We are simply told then that the disciples returned to their homes. What must they have felt like? I can only assume that they were still trying to make sense of what they had seen and not seen.

But meanwhile, Mary had come back, and she stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over and looked into the tomb, and saw two angels where the body had been. They asked: "Woman, why are you weeping?"

Then Mary turned around and saw a man she assumed to be the gardener, it was Jesus; he repeats the words of the angels, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

Mary’s words, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

Then Jesus says: “Mary!” At hearing her name, she turns and recognizes Jesus, “Rabbouni!” (teacher) she replies.

“Go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

This is clear, a new relationship has begun between God and humans. We now all share the same heavenly father and that father is God. It is also clear that the risen Jesus is going to leave them at some point, to return to be with God the Father. This is also our God and Father.

But I want to return for a moment to the story of Mary in this account of the resurrection. Mary was the first person to see the risen Jesus; at first she didn’t recognise him. Was it because she had not expected to see the Jesus she had seen crucified alive again? This is quite likely, because, no one had been raised from death before (except those Jesus had raised)

Or was it because the risen Jesus was different in some way, in his risen body? We cannot be sure. But it is quite possible.

Mary was the one to announce Jesus’ resurrection to the disciples. For many centuries, women have been written out of any significant roles in Christianity, and in other religions too. Yet, here is a woman, who in many early stories circulated about the faith, was supposed to be a woman of ill repute, and she is named as the first witness to the risen Lord.

It has been found that in fact, the bad press that Mary had been given over centuries was founded on myth. The biblical account of her does not say anything about the spirits that Jesus had cleansed Mary of at all. Were those rumours told to discredit her? But why would anyone want to discredit the first witness to the resurrection?

This account must be true, or it would have been removed from the gospel. The very fact that it goes against all expectations of the roles of women at that time of history, makes its authenticity even more certain. This good news of Jesus Christ does not discriminate between men and women, it is good news for all!

Nothing can take away the fact of the resurrection, even those who would seek to dismiss it have not been able to prove their case. The significance of the resurrection goes far beyond any proof that can be put forward by humans. This is God's work!

Today we celebrate the risen Lord, we give thanks to God that through his Son, we have life and have life in abundance. We know that the Lord lives, evidence is all about us, we are so aware of the presence of God in our lives, the many answers to prayer and the blessings with which God has blessed us. We know God's presence in the hard things of life too, in our griefs and our losses. We know God's love in our lives.

Above all, we know that we can walk our lives in intimate relationship with the living God.

May we live our lives in renewed and vital relationship with this risen Lord, and walk with him each day of our lives.

Amen.