

Good Friday Smashed on Easter Day

A few weeks ago, Bob Ward showed me a North Stowe Deanery Magazine dating back to Easter 1934. In it, it listed all the services for Easter Day and you'll be surprised to hear that there were six! This may be your first and only service today, but for me, this is just my third, clearly enjoying a lighter day than some of my predecessors. I was at the Sunrise Service at 6.30am and then at the 9.30 in Rampton. So, by now, I've lit the Easter candle three times to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, which made me think about the precise moment the resurrection occurred.

Jesus' tomb, I think, was a little like this Easter egg (*hold up egg*) – inside it's dark and cramped. Jesus' body had been placed there at the end of the day on Good Friday, where it had remained until the early hours of Sunday, sealed and guarded by Pilate's soldiers. Dark and cramped. But when the resurrection happened, and Jesus burst out of the tomb, Good Friday is smashed once and for all, and new life is set free. Just like this egg (*me to smash egg!*)!

But the actual moment of the resurrection happened in private. No-one saw Jesus rise from the dead, leave the grave clothes behind, and exit the tomb. From today's account of the resurrection from John's gospel, Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark. Her heart would have been very heavy. She would have been weeping at the loss of Jesus and her thoughts must have still been on what she saw happen on Good Friday. She sees that the stone has been removed from the entrance and rushes away to tell Peter and John. We're not told where Peter and John were, but we imagine that they were in a room in a house keeping their heads down following the events of Good Friday. Their grief and sadness must have felt very dark indeed (*hold up another egg*).

But they respond to Mary's news and we read of an amazing race to the tomb. From our dramatic reading – '*robes and sandals and legs everywhere*' as they seek to get there ahead of the other. But whilst John *does* get there first and looks inside, he *doesn't* go in. This is left to Peter, who sees all that John did. John follows him inside and we're told 'saw and believed' – the first disciple to believe that Jesus had risen. All the darkness of Friday's

crucifixion smashed in that moment of understanding (*smash egg*).

But where is Mary Magdalen in this story? There's no discussion recorded between her and Peter and John. Maybe she wasn't able to keep up as they ran to the tomb. We read in verse 10 that the disciples went back to their homes but Mary stood outside the tomb all alone crying. What a sad, dark picture. One of Jesus' closest disciples, she had been the first to see the stone rolled away, she rushes to tell the disciples, to help her make some sense of what she's seen but they don't offer any answers at all. She believes that Pilate's soldiers have removed his body and this compounds her grief further. Her world must have felt very dark indeed (*hold up egg*). Now alone, she goes inside the tomb and sees angels in white sat where his body had laid. They ask her why she's crying and she replies, *'They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him.'* And then she turns around and, in her grief, sees a man who she believes is the gardener. He asks her the same question as the angels, *'Woman, why are you crying?'* but it isn't until he speaks her name – *'Mary'* – that her grief is turned to joy. Her Good Friday is smashed once and for all

as she becomes the first of the disciples to actually see the risen Christ (*smash egg*).

Later that day, in the evening, the disciples are back in the room where they shared the last supper with Jesus. The doors are locked for fear of the Jews. They'd just witnessed Jesus' arrest, mock trial and terrible crucifixion and feared that they would be next. They'd lost their Lord, their teacher, rabbi, the Messiah who'd they'd followed for three years. They'd heard Mary's strange account of meeting Jesus outside the tomb but probably didn't believe her. In their distress and fear, they were still in the darkness of Good Friday (*hold up egg*). And then, out of nowhere, Jesus appears among them and says four amazing words – *'Peace be with you'* – and this is *their* resurrection moment – when they see with their own eyes that Jesus is alive (*smash egg*). They rejoice – you wonder what that looked like – and, again, Jesus says, *'Peace be with you'*.

But Thomas, one of the eleven remaining disciples, isn't there. He misses the moment entirely and even when the others tell him, *'We have seen the Lord'*, but what does *he* say, *'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his*

side, I will not believe. Thomas is still in the darkness of Good Friday (*hold up egg*). It's a whole week before Thomas gets his resurrection moment. They're again in the house, the doors are shut, and once again Jesus appears among them, just as he did before. Almost a repeat performance *just* for Thomas – with the same words, *'Peace be with you.'* And he tells Thomas to touch the wounds on his hands and side. *'Do not doubt, but believe.'* And Thomas answers with *'My Lord and my God!'* his own resurrection moment (*smash egg*).

Another resurrection moment comes to two disciples – one called Cleopas, the other not named but probably his wife – who are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a journey of about seven miles. It's on Easter Day and they're talking together about what has just happened when Jesus joins them. But we're told that their eyes were kept from recognizing him, so he's just a stranger to them. He asks them what they were talking about, and we're told *'they stood still, looking sad'* – still in the darkness of Good Friday (*hold up egg*). They tell their stranger everything that had taken place, about Jesus' arrest and death on a cross, including their hope that he was the one who would redeem Israel. And when they tell him that the women had announced Jesus was alive, but

that they hadn't believed them, Jesus then gives them a biblical history lesson beginning with Moses and the prophets – everything the Old Testament says about him being the Messiah. When they arrive in Emmaus, he stops with them for something to eat and it's in the breaking of bread that their eyes were opened and they recognised him – their resurrection moment (*smash egg*).

And the last resurrection moment is Peter's. Having denied Jesus three times, he finds himself having breakfast on the beach with Jesus. The disciples had been out all night fishing on Lake Galilee but had caught absolutely nothing. They see a man on the beach but didn't know it was Jesus, who calls out to them telling them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. They cast it and the catch is so heavy they can't haul it in. Who is this stranger who seems to know where the fish are? Closer to land, John recognises Jesus and Peter quickly pulls on some clothes and jumps into the lake towards Jesus. Jesus has already got the BBQ alight and is cooking some fish for breakfast. And, after they've eaten, he takes Peter off for a walk – just the two of them.

Peter must have been dreadfully worried about how this conversation would go. Peter knew that Jesus had heard

him deny him three times, and he was deeply ashamed. I imagine that he was in a very dark place that morning (*hold up egg*), unsure as to what Jesus would say or do. And Jesus says to Peter, *'Simon Peter, son of John – do you love me more than these?'* And Peter replies, *'Yes Lord, you know that I love you.'* And Jesus says, *'Feed my lambs'*. A second time he asks him, *'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'* And Peter says again, *'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'* And Jesus says, *'Tend my sheep'*. And then for a third time Jesus asks, *'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'* And Peter is incredibly hurt that Jesus has to ask again. *'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.'* And Jesus tells him again, *'Feed my sheep.'* Peter is forgiven and he has his resurrection moment all over again – (*smash egg*). *'Jesus isn't just alive but he's forgiven me, and what's more, he wants me to look after his people – his sheep! He still wants me to build his church – me, who got it so wrong!'*

I wonder where you are this morning?

Like John?

Mary Magdalen?

The disciples in the locked room?

Doubting Thomas

Cleopas and his walking companion on the road to Emmaus?

or Peter on the beach

at the start of their stories?

Are you still in Good Friday? Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross, and was raised to new life, so that all that believe in him can have new life too? Not just in the world to come, but new life today? And for every one of us in this church today?

Have you had *your* resurrection moment?

If not, what needs to happen for your life to be set free – to leave the darkness of sadness, of disbelief, or shame about something you've got wrong – and to experience the joy of knowing Jesus as your risen saviour? May all of us here today experience the resurrection in a way that is personal to us – out of the darkness of Good Friday – and into the light and joy of Easter Sunday.

So that all of us can say with confidence:

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.