

## Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:22-32 - John 20:19-end

Risen Lord, open our eyes to your presence, and open our hearts to your message to us, today. Amen.



I don't know about you, but I do love a good police and crime drama. Everybody was talking about Happy Valley recently, so I watched it from beginning to end, and I was not disappointed. Police work is incredibly difficult. All the more, it seems, because witnesses tend to contradict each other. And that's because we all perceive things in a different way, with a different agenda, through different experiences that have shaped our lives.

The account of the Resurrection of Jesus is no different. And if you read it in the way a police investigator would, you might quickly give up because witnesses cannot seem to agree on what happened.



The accounts do have one thing in common however: women went to the tomb on the third day and found the tomb open.

In Mark, there are two angels, and they say: 'He has risen! He is not here. He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'

In Matthew, there's only one angel, but he says almost the same thing as the angels in Mark.

In Luke, there are 'two men in clothes that gleam like lightning' and they stand beside the women and remind them of the words of Jesus, saying 'He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you'.

The major difference between those accounts, however, is how and when Jesus meets his friends again. In Mark, there is no meeting at the tomb. In Matthew, Jesus greets the women in person and they clasp his feet and worship him.

In Luke, Jesus meets two people, Cleopas and someone else, walking on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus.



And finally, in John's Gospel, there is only one woman at the tomb, Mary Magdalene. And it is she that Jesus meets at the tomb. Then, Jesus appears to his disciples in a locked room, not in Galilee like he said in the other gospels.

Four similar, yet different accounts. Who are we to believe?

Does it matter? Do we need to pick one? Or can we just accept that different people see different things, but these things are very true?

Do we need more proof? Do we need any proof at all?

Well I would argue that Thomas speaks for us all when he asks to see the nail marks in Jesus' hands and to put his hand in the wound in his side. And Jesus hears his plea, and he does meet his friends and shows the marks and the wounds. Jesus seems to understand that it's hard for us to believe, when we see something that we thought until then was impossible.



The Resurrection of Jesus was an event of monumental proportions. It rocked the world. It turned everything upside down. And what really matters is not so much the details, but that the men and women who saw the risen Christ were *compelled* to tell the whole world.

You heard Peter in our story from the book of Acts. Who would have thought that the man who hid from the Romans would become this powerful speaker and leader of people? His words speak of his great faith.

And you heard John at the end of our passage today, we read: 'These things are written that *you* may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. And that by believing you may *have life in his name.*'

So the order, the sequence, the places may vary, but the witnesses of the Resurrection express the same *faith*. The Gospels are stories of faith in the God who has vanquished death for all people and for all time.

Why? Because not only all these people *saw* something amazing, but they *recognized* the Risen Christ. And what about us? Can recognizing transform our own lives? And what does it mean to *have life in his name*?

Mary Magdalene saw Jesus at the tomb, but she was not sure at first that it was him. It's only when he called her by name, in his familiar voice, that she turned around and did recognise him. The disciples were not sure at first that



Jesus had come back from death, but his familiar greeting, his physical presence made them recognise him. Thomas did not believe at first, but the physical wounds made him recognise the risen Christ.

In other accounts, it is the breaking of bread and the sharing of food that revealed Jesus to his friends. It was God being present in the little familiar things. But his presence was a *new* presence. The early Christians called this 'both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36).



For us too, the familiar things and people can take on a new dimension, a new presence.

Do you remember how regularly you see calls on Facebook and other social media, to light a candle for something or someone special? People light a candle or a lamp on their windowsills for peace, for prayer, in memory of someone. Suddenly, what we see is not just a candle flame, but something that blazes for us because we allow it to hold a personal or collective meaning or message. People leave flowers at the site of an accident. Suddenly, we don't just see a bunch of flowers, but we open up our hearts to the feelings and the pain of others.

It is the same in every resurrection story in the Gospels: God's presence can be seen in the ordinary and the material, and we do not have to wait for supernatural apparitions. The visible things are doorways to the invisible. It is what we do here today, we have water, wine, bread, and these material things connect us to the presence of God.

God has done a new thing, and this new presence is a light that allows us to see things in their fullness.

Just like the first witnesses, we too see Christ in a new light, and we see things in the light of Christ. As Christians, we are called to see Christ in everything

and everyone. And as we *recognize* him, through the love and care that we feel, we *have life in his name*. We live a new life.

Let us pray.

Lord, open our hearts and souls to believe in the Resurrection:

to see your goodness,

to recognize Christ in friends and strangers,

and to do what the apostles did before us:

to celebrate You Lord, to thank You for life,

to worship You, and to do Your work of justice.

Bring us to newness of life,

that we may bring aliveness and rebirth and hope into the world,

however distressing the news becomes.

Amen.