

Bible Study 29th April 2020

In our time together we'll be looking at the readings for Easter Day and the two Sundays since. The readings are below, together with John's talk for each of them. We will begin at 7.30pm and you can join in by using zoom – click

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84221664823?pwd=ZGtoMTI1U0dDL043akQ5OUY2SEc3UT09>

Or if you have the zoom app, login using:-

Meeting ID: 842 2166 4823

Password: 039315

You don't need a computer set up with zoom – you can listen in by dialling from your mobile 02030512874,,84221664823#,,#039315#

or just dial from your landline 0203 051 2874 and when prompted enter the Meeting ID: 842 2166 4823 and Password: 039315.

Opening Thoughts:-

What do you normally enjoy most about Easter?

How was Easter and how have the two weeks following been for you?

Imagine if you can that first Easter Day. Have a brief look at all three Bible readings. What words would you choose to describe how Jesus friends felt?

Are the Easters we normally enjoy like those experienced by the first followers of Jesus, or is this year's Easter in lockdown closer to their experience? Why do you think that?

Let's look at the three passages in a bit more detail:-

Easter Day Bible Reading *John 20:1-18 (NIV)*

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' ¹⁴ At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').

¹⁷ Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Talk

I wonder how you got on making your Easter Garden? It's been great seeing some of your photos; we've put them on the website, and there's still room for more! Here's one I made earlier! You can see the crosses, and the tomb with the stone rolled away with the grave clothes in it.

I wonder how many times over the last few weeks you've begun to doubt and despair, even saying – maybe when trying to get an online shopping slot, or something you'd like to do but can't you've said 'it's impossible'. Here we are meeting in a way none of us could have predicted just a few weeks ago, on Easter morning. We've just heard the event from John's Gospel. What seemed impossible as Jesus friends watched him die on a cross is now transformed as they see Jesus alive. On the first Easter morning the impossible happened.

- The massive stone that had been rolled in front of Jesus' tomb had been moved away from the entrance.
- Inside the tomb where Jesus' body had lain, there was now no sign of it.
- All that was left to see were the grave clothes.

I hope that despite the difficulty getting shopping, you've still managed to get an Easter Egg – here's mine. I'm going to unwrap it now – what do you think I will find inside the egg?

Nothing! That's what Peter discovered as he approached the tomb and saw the stone had been rolled away – nothing there except the grave clothes. For the moment Peter was confused.

Confused too was Mary – she was overcome by grief, thinking that something awful had happened to Jesus body. But the impossible had happened. Jesus was alive, and standing in front of her. In her confusion, she didn't even recognise him; but in meeting the risen Lord Jesus Mary's life was transformed. And did you notice the one word Jesus said to her – 'Mary' – he spoke her name. Many of us are finding different ways to communicate – zoom, facetime, telephones and yes, even letters – though they might need to spend 3 days in quarantine before we open them. Yet it's the sound of a loved one's voice that speaks most clearly, however it's communicated. The risen Lord Jesus said 'Mary'!

Instead of being really sad, *(Show large sad face)*

- Mary was now full of joy. *(Show large smiley face)*

Instead of feeling confused about Jesus, *(Show large sad face)*

- Mary was now full of love for Jesus. *(Show large smiley face)*

Instead of being in despair, *(Show large sad face)*

- Mary was now full of hope. *(Show large smiley face)*

The impossible happened that first Easter Day. Jesus was raised from the dead, and as he met them, their lives were transformed. This is the truth that Christians still discover today. Jesus is still alive, and still speaks our names. However we are feeling about the present situation, and what the future might bring knowing the risen Lord Jesus can do the same for us as it did for Mary.

Instead of being really sad, *(Show large sad face)*

- We are now full of joy. *(Show large smiley face)*

Instead of feeling confused about Jesus, (*Show large sad face*)

- We are now full of love for Jesus. (*Show large smiley face*)

Instead of being in despair, (*Show large sad face*)

- We are now full of hope. (*Show large smiley face*)

I am going to light this year's Easter candle. The transfer on this candle is special to me – I brought it from Durham Cathedral when we were visiting our family in February. It was to be lit today in church, and I was going to be baptising our grandson Arthur. That's having to be put on hold.

But the truth that candle represents is still true. The Easter Candle is used for Baptisms because the risen Lord Jesus Christ is the light of the world, here to transform our lives. So I now invite us to respond. I'll be using the words said at baptism services and the responses are those which we might have said at our confirmation. If you yourself have not yet been baptised or made these promises for yourself, maybe today is the day to make them for the first time. If so, please email me afterwards and let me know you made these promises. However we might be feeling about events in the world around us, when we promise to follow Jesus Christ he changes us just as he changed Mary. The outward circumstances might not change, but Jesus knowing and calling us by name changes sadness to joy, confusion to love, and despair to hope.

Easter 2 Reading: *John 20:19-29 (NIV)*

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.' 24 Now Thomas (also known as 'the Twin'), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them,

'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' 27 Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'

28 Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' 29 Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

Talk

Time is a strange concept. Sometimes it goes quickly – the psychologists say that's when we're in a state of absorption, in other words when we're fully engaged with something. Sometimes slowly-especially when we were younger – dim and distant memories for many now are long journeys with the voice from the back seat 'are we nearly there yet?'. How is time passing for you at the moment? On the one hand it's been a long year already, but at the same time I can't believe this is the 5th Sunday we've not met together in church and lived streamed services instead.

Our reading today follows on from last week's encounter at the tomb of the Risen Lord Jesus and Mary – that reading seems almost a second-by-second, slow motion retelling of that event that changed Mary's life as Jesus spoke her name and as she told the disciples she'd seen the Lord. Yet the events later in the day in the first half of our reading, then Thomas meeting Jesus sees a week pass by in an instant. Let's see those two encounters and think how they might speak to us today. They resonate with me, as they bring to focus concern, anger, doubt, fear, isolation; being locked in. Like the disciples, we are hiding away behind locked doors for fear of the potential danger posed by the virus outside. As for them, so for us, the everyday events which we take for granted are currently denied us, and the normal everyday activities carry risk. As someone put it, after all the wild things I've done in my life, I'll be gutted if I die because I touched my face. For the disciples, contact with the people outside following the resurrection of Jesus carries the risk of injury or even death by mob violence; for us, such contact may lead to illness and even death. All the emotions felt by the first followers of Jesus locked away in fear are fine to express. More than fine, it's vital for our mental wellbeing. We should not feel guilty about these feelings.

Yet, as Christians we can learn a lot from this passage. Easter, unlike our many plans, is not put on hold. Easter in the person of the risen Lord Jesus, and although we may be locked in our homes (apart from our daily walk and getting the essentials if we're able, of course) – the crucified, risen Lord Jesus still comes to us, as he came to those first followers. And how was that? Through the locked doors, speaking words of peace, not just once, notice – he repeats it in case they didn't get it the first time. In our isolation, Jesus can still be there. He promises his peace into our fear, anger and concerns for ourselves and for those we love. And not just his peace, but the person of his peace, the presence of the Holy Spirit. I've been thinking about the presence of the Holy Spirit this week. It's something I so easily forget.

I need to pray again and again 'come, Holy Spirit of Jesus' – gift me as you gifted those first followers, with your peace, with your presence, with your power, enable me to share your good news with those I speak to. Because, did you notice, as Jesus spoke his peace, and poured out his Spirit, he also commissioned them to share his good news. I believe the current situation is causing a new sense of people wanting to know the peace of Jesus for themselves. Will you pray for opportunities for yourself and for others to know Jesus today?

People like Thomas – we don't know where he was, why he was missing. As he returns, the disciples greet him as Mary had greeted them 'we have seen the Lord'. Thomas's response was not rational but full of emotion. How dare Jesus meet with you while I was out! What a long week it must have been for Thomas until Jesus appears to him and the others again. And after Jesus again promises peace he says to Thomas 'go on then'! It is me, see the marks of the crucifixion. What would you have done? There's no evidence that Thomas took up Jesus challenge, but he does respond 'my Lord and my God'. Thomas has now seen, and the Lord Jesus considers that no less or no more than the response called for by every human being – Thomas's response. Ask the crucified, risen Lord to walk through your locked doors, into your feelings and emotions and allow him to speak words of peace to you. Go on, give it a try! He will be there for you, just as he was then. The marks of Jesus' wounds proved to Thomas that the Jesus who appeared to the Thomas and the others in their doubt and fear was the same Jesus who had been nailed to the cross. That same Jesus, who was willing to die to show us the height and breadth and depth of God's love, is willing to be with us in our times of doubt and fear. The Jesus who died also rose again, promising us eternal life whatever lies ahead for us and our loved ones on this earth. Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection are not the end of his story, and they are not the end of ours either. They are only the beginning.

Easter 3 Reading: *Luke 24:13-35 (NIV)*

¹³ Now that same day two of the people who had been there when Jesus died were going home to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything

that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognising him.

¹⁷ He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'

¹⁹ 'What things?' he asked.

'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.'

²⁵ He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

Talk

How are you getting on with your daily exercise? One of the great privileges of living where we do is the beauty of the countryside around us – particularly at the moment the wonderful bluebells. Even though our walks are framed within the confines of lockdown and the constraints that Covid19 has brought, we can still wonder and reflect on the beauty of the world around us. For some of us that might be on our own, for others with other members of our family. In our Bible reading we find a couple on a walk – a sad, strange walk – from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, around 7 miles. It takes place on a Sunday, but not just any Sunday – it's Easter Day but this couple are confused and bewildered. As they walk along, they discuss everything they have seen and heard. They are puzzling about what they can't make sense of. Their friend Jesus' death on a cross; the confused reports about reports of some having seen Jesus alive again. Bemused and bewildered, they start the walk towards Emmaus. A long seven miles, a slow walk.

Luke tells us the name of one of them – Cleopas, and a fair assumption is that he's the husband of one of the Mary's who was there at the crucifixion. But then someone who appears to be a stranger joins them. Luke tells us who this is – it's Jesus who draws alongside them – no social distancing then – but emotional distance means they don't realise who this is, just as Mary Magdalen didn't realise it was Jesus she met by the garden tomb that same morning. The presence of this stranger to them, Jesus as we know, causes them to stop. And in a marvellous God-inspired encounter, Jesus lets them pour out all they are feeling and experiencing. It is a prayer, but as yet they don't realise it is. The sort of prayer we might need to pray at the moment. Simply to tell Jesus our fears, our bewilderment, our concerns and confusion. And just like our prayers, may be even more so in this quieter world, Jesus answers. He answers in his word and presence; he reminds them of Gospel truth in the midst of their despair. He does not deny or denigrate how they are feeling, but embraces them with himself – the eternal word coming from the father. Here we

see faith in action. We can come to God however we are, wherever we are, and the crucified risen Jesus encounters us there. He doesn't need a church building or service to meet us. Just like he gave his peace as he entered the locked doors where the disciples were as we thought about last week, so here his presence causes these two to reflect as we read his word – an important discipline still today. You might want to join in with our Wednesday evening bible study on zoom – email me for details and join us.

And then Jesus moves on - until they invite him in. In their words 'stay with us, because it's nearly evening.' They ask this person who has affected them and already changed them to stay – abide, remain. It's all too easy to call on Jesus in a crisis, and by his graciousness he meets us there. Maybe you haven't been challenged over these last few weeks to rediscover faith, if so, make the prayer of Cleopas and Mary your prayer too. Stay with me, Jesus – remain with me, abide with me. Invite Jesus into your life.

As well as Jesus meeting with these two on the road, opening up the words of scripture, Jesus stays with them. They offer him hospitality, and as the invited guest, Jesus takes, blesses, breaks and gives them bread. Suddenly they realise that this is the same Jesus who had broken bread a few nights before, and had transformed this simple act into a way of remembering his eternal life-giving death.

We are fasting from communion at the moment as a church, but each and every time we break bread – every time we eat, in other words, we can still remember the Lord's death until he comes. We don't need a service of Holy Communion to do that! He is still present; as you walk, reflect on the bible and Jesus life lived for you; as you pray, pour out your hearts to him and feel his loving response, let your hearts be warmed by him; as you break bread, remember him and give thanks that he died for you.

Finally, be ready to share that good news – for this couple it meant a 15k run back to the other disciples in Jerusalem – that might not be good for you to do – but pray for the opportunities, many as there are at the moment, to tell others that Jesus is alive and is ready to listen to their needs for eternal hope in the midst of despair.

Closing questions:-

Thinking about all the passages we've read, what hope can we discover for today?
How does the Risen Lord Jesus meet us now?

Do you have any prayer requests to share with the group?

Worship

for our worship we use a form of compline from the Northumbria Community. You might like to light a candle.

Compline from the Northumbria Community

(If you wish, make the sign of the cross silently)

* I will lie down and sleep in peace for You alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

**O God, and Spirit, and Jesu, the Three,
from the crown of my head, O Trinity,
to the soles of my feet mine offering be.
Come I unto Thee, O Jesu, my King –
O Jesu, do Thou be my sheltering.**

(we say in turn)

My dear ones, O God, bless Thou and keep, in every place where they are.

* Whoever has chosen to make the shelter of the Most High their dwelling place will stay in His over-shadowing.

* He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; He is my God, and I am trusting Him.

* He will rescue you from the traps laid for your feet, and save you from the destroying curse.

* His faithful promises are your armour.

You need no longer be afraid of any terror by night, or the death-arrow that flies by day.

* The Lord Himself is your refuge; you have made the Most High your stronghold.

* Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for You are my crag and my stronghold.

* How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

(we say in turn)

I will not lie down tonight with sin, nor shall sin, nor sin's shadow lie down with me.

**O God of life, this night, O darken not to me Thy light.
O God of life, this night, close not Thy gladness to my sight.
O God of life, this night, Thy door to me, O shut not tight,
O God of life, this night.**

Be it on Thine own beloved arm, O God of grace, that I in peace shall waken.

Jesu, Son of Mary! my helper, my encircler.

Jesu, Son of David! my strength everlasting.

Jesu, Son of Mary! my helper, my encircler.

**The peace of all peace
be mine this night**

**+ in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**