

*Easter Day St Peter de Beauvoir Town 4<sup>th</sup> April 2021*

In the name of God, Creator, redeemer and life-giving Spirit. Amen..

They were frightened – they ran away and said nothing

Mary Magdalen, Mary the mother of James and Salome were frightened and said nothing to anybody.

Yet one by one and strengthened as a group they did tell - first, Simon Peter and the other disciples, and then others; the good news spreading in ever widening circles like ripples in a pool when a stone is thrown in.

The story without end had begun –

It was a risk – they were supposed to have been crushed by the loss of their leader; a bunch of no- hopers on whom the authorities were keeping a watchful eye, but probably thinking there wasn't likely to be any further trouble.

Crowds who follow charismatic leaders usually fizzle out when something happens to the leadership. No doubt this lot would drift back to their homes after the festival, and sooner or later, get back to their old ways, their old jobs. They'd have the sense to keep their heads down now they had seen that the authorities meant business.

But they didn't – they didn't drift back to their old familiar places - and they refused to see that the authorities meant business. If they had – we wouldn't be here now.

The terror, the trembling, the uncertainty all changed. They were careful at the beginning, they met quietly, they prayed in the temple as usual and some of them did go home.

But they were different – they were Easter people, transformed by new life, by the conviction that the ghastly death Jesus had suffered was not the end but the beginning,

And if they went home, when they went home, they went carrying the good news: the kingdom of God is at hand and is breaking in all around us. Look! Jesus the Messiah was dead but now he is alive,

Time passed in a blur of excitement – and by the time of Pentecost – fifty days from now, they were ready to burst – and they did, out onto the streets of Jerusalem – and that’s a story for another day!

But at the beginning they were frightened – and they didn’t want to say anything.

The words we heard from Mark’s gospel are the closing verses – a strange way to end a gospel perhaps – with fear and trembling. Where is the good news? the joy of transformation and new life? People have thought that for a long time, and some have argued that Mark must have written more originally but that the end of the scroll got lost. Perhaps mice ate it? Someone found it so difficult to cope with this ending that he – and it probably was a he – wrote some more verses to finish the story *properly*. These extra verses are still printed in most bibles – but they are usually marked as being additional. So it’s quite possible that the Gospel did indeed end originally with fear and trembling.

And why? Why would you do that?

Because what came next was obvious and well-known to those who heard Mark’s Gospel when it was first written – they already knew Jesus had risen – they probably knew many of the stories of his appearing to the disciples, to the travellers on the Emmaus road, to doubting Thomas and to many others – they would have known about the fire of Pentecost and the disciples exploding with joy and excitement.

Mark’s abrupt ending reminded them, as it reminds us, of that contrast, between darkness, fear and unknowing the terrible grief of the first Easter morning, and the utter horror of it all.

Between all that – and what came next:  
the conviction that Jesus is alive and not dead,  
the horror and disbelief changing to joy, inner strength  
and then a conviction,  
a certainty that could no longer be kept quiet  
but had to be shouted from the roof tops and in the streets  
until people thought they were mad or drunk or both.

And it is because of them, because they overcame the fear and trembling, that *we* hear the good news, and can share their belief that since Jesus was not dead but alive, he could be with them always, as he had promised to the end of the age

The end has not yet come; he is still with us, and we continue to pray for the coming of his kingdom begun on that first Easter morning, and still growing now.

Because we are now an Easter people and can rejoice again in the gift of new life and light for ourselves and for others.

However, without wanting to overshadow the joy, I think it is important, perhaps more so than ever this year, to acknowledge that not everyone leaves Good Friday behind.

The strange ending of Mark's gospel reminds us that Good Friday is not forgotten, and that the grief and the terror are still part of the story, part of life – because death is part of life. And that's important to hold onto, especially this year where so many have been and still are stuck in Good Friday darkness all through this season of illness, loneliness, bereavement and for some the loss of all that made sense of their lives. And while so many suffer in Myanmar, Ethiopia, Sudan, Palestine, Mozambique, and all the other places in the world where evil and barbarous inhumanity claims victory. For some it seems that Easter never comes.

Good Friday teaches us that we have a calling to acknowledge the reality of suffering; to stay with those who feel abandoned, to wait by the Cross.

Easter gives us the hope that joy comes in the morning. *And that in the end all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well*, as St Julian of Norwich put it. And if they aren't yet well, it's because it isn't yet the end.

And that hope makes us an Easter people,  
an Easter people who never overlook the suffering of those stuck  
in the darkness of Good Friday,  
who can when necessary sit with them in their darkness  
but not be overcome by it;  
An Easter people who can rejoice in the good news of Easter,  
and the gift of new life and light for ourselves and for others.

I'll close with some words I have adapted from a meditation by Richard Carter, a priest at St Martin in the Fields:

Forgive us seventy times seven  
For in the wounds of our loneliness and sin  
you planted the seeds of our redemption  
Take us to your tomb and yet beyond it  
Take us home across shallow water and low tide and white morning sun  
Take us to the parting and yet the finding  
The seed dying and yet rising  
Take us home to a grace which came when we never believed it possible  
And flooded us with your mercy  
Take us through the landscape of your love  
Through each encounter of your presence in the face of others  
Take us back to the family we will always love  
To the Christ who goes ahead of us yet waits to welcome us  
And sends us out in the stream of his Spirit  
Take us beyond human understanding to the centre of this city  
To the farthest corners of this world  
In the uniqueness of every human life and in the wonder of each  
encounter...  
May every one of us be a bearer and a witness of your risen life.

We are an Easter people.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!  
*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*