

Easter Day 2020

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him." Now I have told you.'

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

(Matthew 28: 1-10)

It's very easy to feel afraid. I think we all know that, especially at the moment. Whenever we find ourselves in unfamiliar situations there's a sense of trepidation. When that turns into a threat to our health or even to our lives trepidation turns into real fear. 'What will happen to me?' 'Will I cope?' Perhaps even 'Will I survive?' When those thoughts run through our heads it's very difficult to get rid of them.

Thoughts like that must have been in the women's minds when they went to the tomb on the first day of the week, just a couple of days after they'd stood at the foot of the cross, seeing Jesus hang. They went at first light, perhaps because they knew there wouldn't be people around. They didn't want to be recognised as friends of the rebel, the revolutionary who'd been executed because who knew what might happen to them. Then, there were the guards at the grave, would they let them see the body, to anoint it with oils as they wanted, or would they simply arrest them. The women would have approached the grave with trepidation.

But then things got worse – the ground shook and an angel appeared rolling away the stone which closed the opening of the grave. The guards were petrified but the women were given a message. Jesus was alive and they were to share the news. It didn't stop them being afraid even though they'd been told there was nothing to fear. They had wonderful news to share, but there was still this niggle. Things could still go badly wrong, in all sorts of ways. The other disciples might not believe them. The guards might revive and give chase. They weren't completely comfortable. Until... Jesus appeared. He met them, he spoke to them, they went to him, they worshipped him and he told them not to be afraid.

So they faced their challenge. They went back to the group of men who had been close friends of Jesus and convinced them that the one they followed wasn't dead after all but was waiting for them in Galilee. Women who had no status, no position and no authority found that their trepidation became confidence, their fear turned into joy, and they became the first to spread the news of the risen Jesus.

On this Easter Sunday, we remember that message. Jesus lives, and he tells us today not to be afraid. Despite our lockdown, despite social distancing, despite self-isolation we can still rejoice. It may not feel the same, not being able to get together with fellow worshippers, not even being able to join our families to celebrate. But we know that on that first Easter Day Jesus rose to life again and despite the shadow of fear that coronavirus has brought into our lives he is still with us and will remain alongside us for ever. Alleluia!