

Sometimes we forget just how special our faith, and our freedom to worship is! One of the joys of the Triduum, the very special three days we have just observed is that if we journey with through the stories of Jesus last days then hopefully we encounter something new to us; or even remember something we have forgotten. Sometimes Easter can feel like catching up with old friends where you share common stories from the past; but Easter is more than just the past – it is also about now and who we know God in the way we live.

The joy of remembering is that sometimes we realise that our memory has played tricks on us, and the story is not as we recalled. Over the last few days I have spoken to a number of people who recounted stories of events which they thought they remembered well only to realise that one key factor didn't take place at all; or at a different time.

When we listen and participate in the stories of Holy Week and Easter we are reminded in a new way of the events – and we are also reminded just how special they are!

This year, Year B in lectionary, we hear the story of the resurrection from Mark's Gospel. Now while for Mark most of the events and characters are similar to that of the other Gospels - All of them place this story at the tomb; the time is early in the morning on the day after the Sabbath; and Mary Magdalene shows up in all the accounts. But what is sometimes unsettling in Mark's account is that Jesus doesn't appear. Rather to see Jesus the disciples and those who want to witness the resurrection have to travel out into the border regions. Philip Ruge- Jones puts it this way to see Jesus in Mark's Gospel *'you have to go back to Galilee where he promises to meet us. Going back to Galilee means going back to the margins where Jesus ministered and encountering him again feeding the hungry, driving out the demons that torment people, preaching words of hope to the broken-hearted, healing those in distress, and breaking down the barrier walls that separate people'*¹.

I think in many ways Mark's account, because it leaves us wanting more, challenges its readers – us to not only go out into the margins to find Jesus; but also have the courage to meet Jesus in new and fresh ways – every time we hear the story.

It challenges us to not just think we know the story, but to actually read it and realise how amazing it is – no matter how familiar it is. I was struck by this yesterday when I was meeting with Ardalan and Somayah, talking about Ardalan's baptism today. Ardalan will share some of his story with us this morning, but as we chatted yesterday I was reminded of how exciting faith can be – and seeing Ardalan excited about Baptism, after waiting for a long time, reminded me not to take my own faith

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3611

for granted. It is so easy to just go through the motions, without allowing ourselves to remember both the joy and emotion of our faith.

Easter is a time when we all renew our baptism vows, when we are reminded of the promises we have made in baptism and confirmation. We can just answer the questions of statement of fact – because we do believe. But I was challenged yesterday to remember that answering these questions is not just about fact; but they are of course statements of faith which engage not only mind, but our soul and spirit. They are emotive statements which call us to take risks. For us in central London these may not feel like risky statements – but Mark is right we are not called to a faith which keeps us kneeling and praying in the garden at the empty tomb. We are called to a faith which sends us out to the margins to bring change to the world.

The other challenge of Mark's account is the last sentence, the women did not do as the angel says rather *'fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid'*² I suspect for each of us there is an element of the women's behaviour; times when the story of Easter, or even the responsibility of our faith fills us with fear and so we do not tell anyone. I often speak with people who have encountered God in a vision or a dream; or even when reading the bible; but they have not felt confident or safe enough to share their experience with anyone – even others in the same faith community.

Let us not be too hard on the women in this story, because it takes a great deal of courage to share experiences of faith with others. Even here in church, where you would hope we have similar aspirations in faith, we are often fearful of sharing stories of our faith with others. Sometimes this is because we are shy, or feel overwhelmed – but often I think it is like the women in the garden – we do not think anyone will believe what we have seen and what we have heard.

I have shared with some of you before that for a long period in my life I refused to tell people that I was a Christian – I thought they would think I was mad – or boring – or weird (actually I was weird so that wasn't really a surprise). But I know also that fear came from the fact that I knew many of friends thought they knew what a Christian was – but actually it was based on a stereotype which didn't relate to the kind of faith I – or most of us have. I feared that they wouldn't listen to what I had experienced and why I believed. This was even more profound when I became a Priest, it becomes a little harder to deny you are a Christian at that point!

I have realised though that in behaving this way I undervalued the friends I had, because I didn't trust I could tell them; but also I sold myself short because I didn't trust that God knew what God was doing!

Mark's Gospel account reminds us of the courage that each of us needs to have as we live out our faith, not only on the margins but here to at St Anne's. It reminds us

² Mark 16:8

that we need to be open to hearing about the experiences that each of us have, the struggles we encounter as we read the scriptures together or as we pray for each other the world.

Easter is a time which reminds us of the story and purpose of our faith, but it is also a time which reminds us of who we are too! And I hope that as a community we will continue to grow in confidence in sharing our experiences with each other.

Today as we re-affirm our baptismal vows, as we are sprinkled with Holy Water, we are invited to remember how special our faith is, how much God welcomes us and loves us. We are reminded that Christ claims us; but also that we take the light of the Easter candle, and the light of our baptism with us throughout our life.

In a few moments as we and Ardalan make our promises together – may we have the courage like those first followers to go and tell; and to continue to share with each other the joy of our faith.

Happy Easter!