

A sermon preached by The Revd. Nigel Guthrie at Holy Cross, Crediton at Evensong on Easter Day 8th April 2012

Readings: Ezekiel 37: 1-14 & Luke 24: 13-35

Understanding Easter does require some imagination because if we turn to the bible hoping to find a scientific explanation of what happened at the first Easter Day we will be disappointed.

Perhaps understanding Easter is more like doing a jig saw puzzle? Imagine that you have been given a puzzle of a scene but it is not in its original box. So you tip it out on the table and begin to have a look at the pieces. You will have no idea what the puzzle illustrates but as you turn over the pieces you gradually pick up some clues. If you are successful in putting it together you will end up with an attractive picture but even then it will only be a picture. But perhaps it is a picture of somewhere you have been in which case you will have memories of what the place was like. Or perhaps you haven't been there but at least the picture helps you to imagine what the place might be like. We need to put together the stories of resurrection from the bible and then we begin to get a picture which shows us the surprise and joy of the disciples, the vivid impression which Jesus' appearances made on those who met him, and the mysterious fact that sometimes Jesus was recognized and sometimes not.

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is just that, a vision. But it was a vision that enabled him to imagine something which he might have thought in his sober and rational moments would be impossible. The exiled and disillusioned people of Israel people had lost hope and were cut off from their homeland. They needed a vision to encourage them to hope for what might come about in the future. As Ezekiel saw the dry bones coming together in his dream and saw them being clothed with sinews and flesh and saw the breath of life being breathed into them he began to think the unthinkable, to think that his people could be restored – as indeed they were in due course when the exiles were sent home from Babylon and the temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem. His vision adds to the jigsaw to give us a deeper picture of what resurrection might mean.

But perhaps you are not really into jigsaws. Perhaps you are into old motorbikes? Now if I was given an old motorbike in bits I would be quite stuck. But perhaps you are more mechanically minded than me? I know one or two people who could look at a box of old motorbike bits and see the potential for a working machine. They could see straightaway what many of the bits were for and could see how they would fit together.

When a man started walking alongside the disciples on the road to Emmaus on the evening of Easter Day they couldn't tell who he was. He told them encouraging things which warmed their hearts but they still didn't recognize him. Yet when they got to their destination they wanted to hear more and invited him stay with them and share a meal. It was when he broke the bread they realized that they had seen someone do it like that before. They realized that their companion was Jesus with whom they had spent a great deal of time over the past few years and who had just been killed on a Roman cross. But just as they realized who he was Jesus vanished from their sight. He was gone but they could still say 'The Lord has risen indeed'.

God does not force us to believe, he does not force us to believe in him, or to believe that Jesus was his Son or to believe that he brought Jesus from the dead. But the parts of the puzzle intrigue us. We want to see how they fit together. Perhaps like the disciple who walked on the road to Emmaus we can't quite make sense of it? But it is hard to hear these stories of resurrection without feeling challenged. The challenge is to get as comprehensive a picture as we can from the bible. But even when we put them all together, like a completed jigsaw, we are not quite there. We are looking at the picture, we are not actually part of the scene.

And if we are clever enough to put an old motorcycle together there is still a further challenge which is to put fuel in it, start it up, climb on to it and drive away. Perhaps that is more like the challenge of the resurrection for us? We not only have to hear the stories and put them together into a beautiful picture; we also have to believe them and to live our lives as if they are true, as if 'the Lord is risen indeed'. After all what is the point of putting a motorbike together and then leaving it in the shed? And what is the point of the resurrection for us if we do not know that God's promise of resurrection and eternal life is for us - and to be shared with those around us?