

Easter Day 2018 9.30am Crediton

These days when some event happens which changes the lives of a sizable number of people there is usually the demand for a full and thorough investigation. If the event is of a substantial importance then often there is the cry that a public enquiry should look into the incident; such is the case when controversial plans are drawn up which will effect a local area of outstanding beauty or the lives of many in the locality will be changed if the planning is granted. If there has been an incident that has resulted in the tragic death of many people as in the Grenfell Tower Block fire in North Kensington in June last year. Then there is often a judicial review especially if there is seemingly criminal negligence.

Yet for the events that happened in and around the garden tomb in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago there is no official report. BUT it changed the lives of a sizable number of people that day and countless millions since. Although it was an event of epoch making importance which has changed the history not only of the inhabitants of that region but of the world. Although it was certainly an event of life and death importance – eternal and everlasting life. Yet there was no investigative report, no public enquiry or judicial review at the time it all took place.

The resurrection of Jesus which we celebrate today, happened in secret, in the darkness of a stone tomb and the Gospel writers do not attempt to describe it - it is beyond the capacity of human words. Instead, the four Gospels tell us different stories about the people who were there, hinting at what they experienced and what effect it had on their lives.

Take Mary Magdalene. Despite their differences, all the Gospels agree that she was the first to see the risen Jesus. We are told that she was someone Jesus had healed, and as a result she had become one of his followers. Imagine the emotions she must have felt that first Holy Week and Easter. Delight as Jesus was welcomed by the palm-waving crowds, turning to anxiety as the threats to his safety escalated, despair as he was arrested and tried, torment as she watched him die, hopelessness as she helped to bury him, grief as she returned to anoint his body. And then the amazement as she met him alive again! Jesus gave Mary a new start, twice — once when he healed her, and again when he made her the first messenger of his resurrection.

Then there was Peter. One of Jesus' closest friends, who had let him down so badly in his hour of need. Faced with the danger of arrest, Peter had been unable to cope with his fear. So he had denied knowing Jesus — as Jesus had predicted that he would.

When Jesus died, his world must have fallen apart, because now he would never have the chance to say he was sorry. BUT the resurrection gave him that chance, and with it a message of reconciliation for all people. And we learn from Peter that no wrong that we can do, no denial or harsh words, no injury or insult, is beyond the reach of God's love. The love that can conquer death, that can deal with any wrong that human beings can do, that can neutralise and forgive it.

And then there was Thomas, forever known as doubting Thomas. He refused to believe that Jesus was alive again — and who can blame him? It's such an unlikely story. But Thomas has come to stand for all who find faith difficult, who have doubts about the story of salvation. Thomas insisted on seeing and touching Jesus before he would believe. When Jesus granted his wish, he did not berate or punish him for his doubting, but accepted Thomas as he was.

What is there for us in these stories, as we gather today to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus? Perhaps some of us, like Mary, are in need of a new start. Perhaps we have become weighed down by problems, by bereavement, by illness, and we feel there is no escape. For us, then, today offers new hope. The resurrection of Jesus shows us that God's love is stronger than any sense of despair.

Or perhaps, like Peter, we bear the guilt of hurtful things said, or perhaps things unsaid; wrong things done, that we feel we can never put right. The message of the resurrection is one of forgiveness. There was no condemnation in the eyes of the risen Jesus as he looked at Peter, **and** there is no condemnation as he looks upon us; there is only love.

And perhaps we have doubts about the details of the Christian faith, or questions about the resurrection story we focus on today. Like Thomas, we may have moments when we long for some hard evidence. Thomas' story affirms that we are allowed that longing. We are allowed to doubt, and our doubts do not cut us off from the power of Jesus' resurrection. Whatever the state of our faith in God, God has faith in us.

To all who are in despair, to all who are caught up with guilt, to all who doubt, the message of the resurrection is this: God's love is stronger. If death cannot defeat God, then anything is possible. There is always hope, there is always forgiveness, there is always a future.