

Sunday Thought

17th April 2022 Easter Day

Readings

Acts 10: 34 - 43

Psalm 118: 1 - 2, 14 - 24

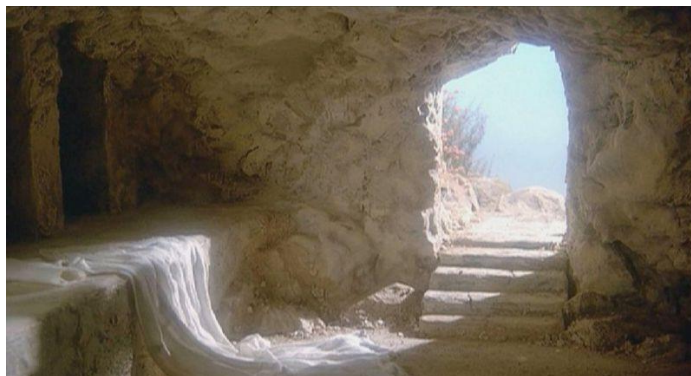
1 Corinthians 15: 19 - 26

John 20: 1 - 18

What a difference ...

What a difference three days
can make!

John's Easter story is told in beautiful detail. He was there. The first light of that new day would never fade from his memory. He captures Mary's early visit to the garden tomb after another sleepless night. He feels her distress and tears at finding an empty sepulchre. How could he forget his and Peter's hurried response to her news? They ran, not knowing what to expect. Their fears and hopes, like Mary's, were dashed to disappointment and further bewilderment. It seemed to be the start of a third day of painful questions, all mixed in a culture of fear, hope and tempting faith as they searched remembered words of Jesus and the scriptures. These were the wearing, wearying, waiting, in-between days shared today by patients longing to know if the treatment worked. Then Mary, not wanting to be parted from last moments with her Lord, stay long enough to meet angels – then there's a gardener – then Jesus – alive! *'Mary!' 'My Master!'* What a difference the third day makes!



There is a lot of movement in John's story – much hurry! Peter is still running several years later in today's story of the Church's unfolding post-Pentecost mission. He is making fast journeys around the coastal area of Caesarea and Joppa. Luke writes with a similar breathlessness of healings – Aeneas and others at Lystra, and Tabitha at Joppa. It is the beginning of the church at Joppa where Peter lodges at the tannery of a convert called Simon. Any doubts about the day of resurrection changing things are dispelled with the images of Peter preaching to non-Jews and staying in what he would normally think of as the unclean home of a smelly worker with animal skins. No strict Jew would countenance it. With barely a gasp for breath – not unexpected in that place - the story continues with visions, angels, and another hurried journey back up the coast to Caesarea where Peter witnesses to a Roman captain of the Italian Regiment. The captain immediately responds with faith in Christ Jesus and a desire to become a member of The Way of Jesus.

I can imagine Peter preaching with the same breathless urgency, telling Cornelius the story from John's baptism through Jesus' ministry to that other baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He emphasises Jesus' crucifixion and how three days later he returned – alive again! In doing so he convinced himself with his own words. *'I can see it all now. I can see how I have been led by the Spirit. I see'*, he confesses, *'what Jesus intended when he said the Kingdom of God is for everyone, Jew, and Gentile alike. It's for the whole world!* What a difference just ten Bible verses and another three days make towards changing the world! I think Mary of Magdala also Jesus' meaning when in the Easter Garden, he said to her, *'Don't hold on to me Mary'*. Holding on to him would be staying with day two and all its doubts and questions. *'Mary, it's day three! Everything is about to change. Go and tell my brothers! Tell the world!'*

It was Paul who was given the task of reaching out to the Gentile world. His words to a very mixed congregation at Corinth have the same breathless assurance about them as he delves deeper into what Jesus' resurrection means. Christ IS alive he assures them, and it follows that everyone who belongs to him and shares his life will rise too. We are to share the victory of the Father's eternal kingdom and know that death itself is defeated. *It's our third day guarantee!*

It is for us too, of course. What a difference the guarantee can make to our lives. May I suggest a simple Easter week meditation exercise – taking some time on each of three consecutive days. The first day to think about the Cross and what it costs God to love his world and all its people, bearing in mind today's headlines of war, crime, and suffering of a million kinds. Another day to pray about it all – talking with him about a sad, sad world – but not forgetting the joys. Then a third day to feel him close and get our running shoes ready (or maybe oil the wheels of the zimmer! – but it doesn't matter who's first!) Time to be sure Jesus, our Lord, our God, is alive! Us too! What a difference three days can make! Everything may change!

An Easter Prayer (with Psalm 118 in mind)

Lord, our God, we share in the breathless wonder of Easter.
Realising how good you are, we praise you for your changeless, eternal love.

Our life in Jesus gives us your assurances: We shall not die.
We shall live to proclaim your goodness with all your people on earth and in heaven:
Even though we may bear a cross of suffering and feel you take us to the far end of our trials,
we know that you are with us.
We have your third day guarantee!

The Lord is Risen! Jesus is alive!
Christ is with us! His Spirit is in us!
This is His Day And Ours!
Allelujah!



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