

TALKING POINTS 3

Day 13 (Easter Sunday) (John 20:1-18)

Have you ever lost something very special? Perhaps you remember crying yourself to sleep when you were little because you couldn't find your favourite 'cuddle' toy. At times like that it feels as though we will never be happy again.

There is a verse in the Bible which says "Sobbing can remain through the night, but joy comes in the morning. (Ps 30:5). This was certainly true at the first Easter.

Mary Magdalene spent much of the first Easter Sunday in tears. The women who loved Jesus had set out at first light to go to the tomb where Jesus was buried. They had probably been wondering how they were going to move the stone in front of the grave. But when they got there, they saw that it had already been rolled away. That must have seemed like good news until they looked inside. Then they were shocked to discover that the tomb was empty! This was good news, but they didn't realise that yet.

The women thought that people had come and taken Jesus' body away. I am sure Mary Magdalene imagined the body of her beloved leader being bumped around unlovingly. Maybe she thought that Jesus' disciples had moved the body. Perhaps that is why she ran to them but they were as shocked by the news as she was.

Meanwhile Mary was still sobbing. Even the sight of angels back at the tomb didn't make her feel better. And when someone came up to her, her eyes were so full of tears that she didn't realise who it was. It was only when the person said "Mary" that she recognised the voice and realised that it was Jesus who was talking to her.

At once her sad tears stopped. But I suspect that they were replaced by tears of joy as she hugged Jesus! And then, just as Jesus told her, she rushed off to tell the disciples. I am sure that even before she spoke they knew she had good news – she was so full of joy. The words probably bubbled out: "I have seen the Lord!"

We should be as joyful as Mary today. Death didn't keep Jesus locked up; he broke down death's doors to lead us all out into the "joy" of the morning.

Plan a dance through the house to show your joy. Use anything you can to make music and sing as you go into every room: "Jesus Christ is risen! Hallelujah!"

Day 14 (Mark 16:9-11)

Why do you think it is easier for us to believe Mary, than it was for the disciples to do so? Here are three possible reasons: We have the story written down for us; we know that for hundreds of years people have believed the news; we have celebrated Easter for years.

But some of the disciples had watched Jesus die and they had told the others how terrible it had been. They had spent the whole of Saturday weeping and news of a risen Jesus seemed too crazy to be believed.

When Mary first came to them, two of the disciples went out to check the tomb. They didn't see Jesus or even any angels – just an empty tomb. Perhaps because of the way the grave clothes were lying undisturbed, one of them sort-of began to wonder whether Jesus might have risen, but at that stage I suspect this was just a thought.

So the disciples just didn't believe Mary. They probably thought she was so upset that she had imagined it, that she was hallucinating. (In those days, people didn't easily believe what women said any way. For instance, women couldn't speak out in court because they were thought to be such bad witnesses!)

But Mary knew the great truth, before of any of the men. God, who knows that both men and women can love him, had given her the great joy of knowing the news first. I am sure that nothing that the men could say made Mary change her story. She knew that she had seen and spoken to and hugged Jesus. And because she didn't change her story, we can share her joy.

Gradually the good news spread. Nothing had been able to stop the resurrection. Now nothing could stop the news being shared. Desperately, the leaders of the Jews tried to spread the lie that the disciples had stolen the body while the guards slept – they paid the soldiers to say this! Some people believed them, but the disciples and Mary knew this was nonsense.

Sadly there are still people around today who don't believe this good news. Like Mary, we are sent to tell them, but they probably won't listen to our words as much as they will watch to our actions. We need to share the joyful news by word *and* by loving others as Jesus did, by caring for others as Jesus did and by obeying him each day. Then others will see that Jesus is alive in us and get the good news.

Day 15 (Luke 24:13-19, 28-33)

Let's imagine your family has been on an outing. Now imagine that someone asks a question about the outing when the whole family is together. If it was an exciting day out, usually everyone talks at once and everybody talks about different things. After all, different things interest different people.

This is what happened with the story of the resurrection. It is so difficult to work out in what order things happened because Jesus' friends were all so excited that each one tells a different bit of the story! Sometimes they sound like contradictions, but that is just excitement talking!

One bit which Luke tells us a lot about is when two of the disciples left Jerusalem to go back to their home village of Emmaus. They probably felt that there was no point in staying in Jerusalem because they really believed that Jesus was dead. They walked along sadly, talking about Jesus. Along the way a stranger caught up with them and, as he walked alongside them, he asked what they were discussing so seriously. They couldn't believe that he was even asking that question! After all, everybody in Jerusalem was talking about the death of Jesus. Was there anything else to talk about? (Sounds like today when everybody just talks about the virus, doesn't it?)

They explained that they were very disappointed. They had really thought that Jesus might be the promised messenger from God (Messiah), but they had obviously got it wrong- the Messiah would not have been crucified. The women's story about him being alive was clearly nonsense. Their friend was dead.

To their surprise the stranger started to explain many things which the Old Testament had promised about the Messiah. It was so interesting that, when they got to their home, they invited the stranger to stay the night so he could tell them some more.

As they sat down to supper, the stranger took the bread and blessed it and shared it with them. Suddenly they remembered Jesus' actions at the last supper and they recognised the voice. Suddenly they knew this stranger was Jesus – alive and real. He disappeared from the room then, but the two friends were so sure of their good news that they immediately ran all the way back to Jerusalem (about 11 kms) to tell the others.

Like Mary and the other women they couldn't keep the good news to themselves. And because their story is written down for us, we can share in their excitement. Jesus may not join us for supper, but he will come in when we invite him into our lives. And he won't disappear – he will always be at our side to give us courage when we are down or when things are tough.

Day 16 (Luke 24:33-43)

When the two travellers got back to Jerusalem, bursting with the news that Jesus was alive, they found the disciples were bouncing off the ceiling! Simon Peter had seen Jesus too. We don't have any details about that, but it is clear that the disciples were beginning to think that maybe Jesus was alive after all.

Then, while the travellers were explaining what had happened to them, suddenly Jesus was there with the group. The disciples got a terrible shock. After all, the door was locked and no-one could come in unless someone in the room opened the door for them! Remember, they had locked themselves into the upstairs room, very scared that if they put their noses out they would be arrested.

After a moment of panic they realised that it really was Jesus standing there. However, they thought he was a ghost and that made them even more scared. Fortunately, Jesus understood their fear and his first words were "Peace be with you". Perhaps they were still a bit unsure because then he showed them the nail-prints in his hands and he showed them where the spear had pierced his side. He let them feel his bones and touch his skin. Gradually they became convinced that this was really Jesus, not a ghost.

But even though they felt a huge wave of joy break over them, it was still very difficult to believe that Jesus was actually alive again. So Jesus gave them another proof: he asked for some food! Now I have never heard of a ghost that eats (not even in Harry Potter books!) and it seems as though that request finally convinced the disciples. They gave Jesus a piece of fish and he ate it.

Now that the panic was over, Jesus was able to explain (just as he had done on the road to Emmaus) that their Old Testament scriptures had told that the Messiah would die - but people hadn't understood those parts. His disciples therefore needn't ever be afraid. God is always in charge of everything that happens.

That is a good reminder to us that God is in charge of today also. Sometimes it is easy to get worried and scared just as the disciples did. But we needn't do so for, if God was wonderful enough to bring Jesus back to life again, then he is great enough to handle all our problems too.

Day 17 (John 20:26-29)

We find it hard to understand the resurrection even though we have lots of reports about those days. Imagine how difficult it must have been when the news was just passed along from person to person. I am sure some people thought that the news they were getting had got all mixed up, like it does when we play the broken telephone game.

One of the disciples, Thomas, thought this. He hadn't been with the group when Jesus appeared in the room and he just refused to believe them. He probably thought they had dreamt about Jesus or hallucinated because they were so tired and so sad. In fact he told the others that he would not believe until he had put his fingers into the nail-print and put his hand into the sword wound on Jesus' side. That sounds really yucky, doesn't it? I am sure Thomas was absolutely sure he would never have to do anything like that because he really believed Jesus was still dead.

However, one week later, Jesus visited his disciples again and this time Thomas was there. Once again Jesus came in even though the doors were shut.

I wish I could have seen Thomas' face! After Jesus had greeted them all, he turned to Thomas and invited him to come and feel the nail-prints and the sword wound. This was amazing for Jesus hadn't even been there when Thomas had said that he wanted to do that! I suspect that Thomas' legs turned to jelly. He couldn't have moved even if he had wanted to.

Instead he simply gasped out the words: "My Lord and my God!" He was convinced that this was Jesus who was alive again. And he knew that this was so spectacular that it meant that Jesus could not be anyone else but King of his life.

I am a Christian because I believe there is plenty of proof that Jesus really did rise from the dead. I haven't seen him like the disciples did, but I know that the fact that Jesus came to them can only mean that he is God. I therefore echo Thomas's words.

Isn't it time you accepted him as your Lord and King too?

Day 18 (John 21:1-14)

After the disciples had seen Jesus, they weren't sad any longer but the days were probably still quite difficult. I expect they spent every moment wondering if Jesus was coming to see them again. So if the wind rattled the door, they would have half-expected Jesus to come in..

Eventually the disciples walked the long road back to Galilee where they had first met Jesus. To their joy, Jesus met them there again. But still there were days when they didn't see him.

Peter was never very good at waiting patiently and one evening he decided that he needed to get out and do something. (You probably know that feeling at the moment as you are under lockdown!) So Peter told his disciple-friends who were with him that he was going to go fishing. They thought this was an excellent idea and off they all went.

But, although most of them knew a lot about fishing, that night they caught not one fish. Then, as the sun came up they made their way back to the shore, convinced it was no use going on: the fish just weren't biting that day.

In the half-light they saw that someone else was up early too. This man was standing on the beach of the lake. When they got near enough, he shouted out to ask if they had caught any fish. When he heard that they hadn't, he told them to throw their nets down on the right side of the boat. The disciples probably thought that because the man was on shore he could see the shadow of a shoal which they couldn't see from the boat. So they did what he said. Amazingly, they got a catch. In fact, so many fish swam into the net that the disciples couldn't pull it back up onto the boat.

Suddenly one of the disciples realised that the stranger was Jesus! When he told Peter this, Peter was so thrilled he jumped overboard at once and waded in to the shore to get to Jesus. Fortunately they were not too far out by now! The other fishermen were left to drag the over-full net in to the shore. They probably worked as fast as they could so they too could see Jesus before he disappeared again.

When they got to land, they discovered that Jesus had made a braai fire. Peter went back to the boat to collect some fish to braai and, while the fish cooked, they counted and discovered they had caught 153 big fish – but the net had not broken! And then they sat on the beach and had breakfast with Jesus, bread and fish. I am sure they remembered the day he had fed 5000 people near there with bread and fish.

Jesus knew that Peter felt terrible that he had betrayed him before the crucifixion and, after breakfast, he walked away with Peter. Peter knew that he was forgiven and that Jesus still wanted him to be part of his team.

Jesus will always forgive those who are sorry about the bad things they do. He has plans to use anyone who recognises that he is Lord and King and Saviour in his team too.

Day 19 (1 Corinthians 15:3-6)

There are no more detailed stories about how people saw Jesus after he had risen from the dead.

However, today's reading tells us that Jesus appeared to 500 of his friends (men and women) on one occasion. I wish we knew some of the details: Who were these people? Where were they? Why had they met up? How did it happen? But God knows that we don't need the details. This statement is there to convince anyone who wants to think that Mary Magdalene and the disciples made up this story or dreamt it all. 500 people cannot all have the same vision or dream or hallucination at the same time.

Do you notice what the Bible goes on to say? It says most of those 500 people were still alive when that comment was written. Paul who wrote down this fact wasn't interested in Jesus when he was on earth and wouldn't have been with the crowd. So he must have heard the story from some of the 500. He must also have known that many other people had also heard the story from them. If he had got it wrong they would have told him this was nonsense. So here is another proof that Jesus really was alive after the crucifixion.

So Jesus was not a ghost, even though his body had changed after the resurrection. At this time he could appear and disappear in a flash and he could travel without making a journey. However, people could see him, recognise him, and touch him. Jesus was really there.

Over the years since then, some people have tried to argue that this is probably nonsense. Most of those people have never read the Bible carefully so they don't know what they are talking about. A few of them, however, have set out to study the facts, hoping to prove that the stories don't add up and that they must be inaccurate. In many cases, these attempts have flopped. For example, a lawyer called Frank Morrison, set out to examine the evidence just as he would in a court room. But the more he studied the facts, the more he realised the story is true and his book was never written. Instead he wrote a very well-known book explaining that resurrection really happened!

Jesus defeated death just as he had promised to do. He is the only person ever to have done so. This means that I need to listen to the other things that he said. And when I do that, I discover that he really loves us and wants to be part of our lives.

Now that you have heard these stories, do you agree?

Day 19 (John 21: 15-22)

Day 20 (1 Cor 15:)

500

Day 19