

Easter Day 2020: Acts 10.34-43; Colossians 3.1-4 John 20.1-18

One of the questions that I have heard a lot this week is how will it all end? What is the plan for ending this pandemic? And I suppose there's another question that we may be asking ourselves: How will we know? Or, when will we know? When this all started I imagined a moment of national rejoicing like when the Second World War ended. A moment of street parties and bell ringing and services of thanksgiving. But it seems more likely that this will end gradually, in stages. And I wonder when we will feel like it is finally all over. Will it be when we are able to see family members again? Will it be when we are able to gather in church again and listen to our wonderful choir? Or will it be when we are able to travel? To go on holiday? When will we know?

And as I was thinking about this, I realised that at that first Easter it took a while for people to recognise what had happened. We know because we have the benefit of hindsight but it took a while for the followers of Jesus to recognise that Jesus had risen from the dead. Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter and John found the empty tomb on that first Easter morning but that could have meant a number of things. It could have meant that someone had taken Jesus' body away. That's certainly what Mary assumed. Even when the risen Jesus appeared in front of her she did not recognise him. She thought he was the gardener. It was only when Jesus spoke her name that she knew who he was. She longed to touch Jesus as we long to touch one another but he told her that it was not yet time, just as it is not yet time for us. Instead, Jesus told Mary to go and tell the disciples. Mary was the first apostle. The first to carry the good news of the resurrection. But at first, not all of the disciples believed her. Some of them thought she was making it up.

Later that day, two disciples were returning to Emmaus. And Jesus joined them on the road. But again, they didn't recognise him. It was only when he broke bread with them that they realised who he was. In the following days, Jesus appeared again in locked rooms and by the sea of Galilee. He ate and drank with the disciples. And gradually the penny dropped. Jesus really was alive. Easter is not just one day. The Easter season continues until the Ascension and Pentecost as we think about how the news spread and more and more people encountered the risen Jesus.

Some, like Thomas, really struggled to believe that Jesus really was alive. He was still stuck in his grief and guilt. He refused to believe until he could touch the wounds left on Jesus' body by the nails and the spear. And there will be many who have lost relatives and friends who will need time and a lot of love before they can have any sense that this is over. Any sense that we have come through this. They will still be stuck in Good Friday and we will need to be gentle with them just like Jesus was gentle with Thomas.

But those of us who can, need to be alive to signs of resurrection all around us. We won't be able to do that all the time but we must make the most of them when we see them. Because we are an Easter people. We are people of hope. People who know that death and suffering do not have the last word. That there is always life beyond. One of the lovely things that has come out of this time has been the puzzle library that Mary Grover has created. And in a way we all have different pieces of the puzzle to contribute. Like Jesus' followers, we have different signs of new life and resurrection to identify and give thanks for. Not just the beautiful spring weather and flowers but the rainbows made by children and stuck on windows, the applause for the NHS and other key workers, the kindness of strangers, the new and renewed relationships and changing values. Just as the world was never the same again after Jesus rose from the dead, so our world will never be quite the same after all this is over. What has happened, is happening, is terrible and traumatic. It's not something any of us would have wished. But from it new and wonderful things are coming to light. As Christians we are called to be witnesses of these things - to point them out. To celebrate them. These are all signs of Easter. Of resurrection.

I don't know when all of this will be over. But it will. The promise of Easter is that there is always resurrection. Because Jesus died and rose again, there is always a new beginning. Christ is risen. Alleluia!