

20150405EasterDaySermon

We often hear the phrase, “preaching to the choir” meaning that the preacher was telling us something we all knew and had heard many time before, the choir has heard the Good News preached so often they could switch off because they’ve heard it all before and they know it all.

Well today at this service I’m truly preaching not ‘to the choir’ ‘for the choir’ because they were at the 6am Easter Vigil and have already heard one Easter Sermon. So I’ve chosen the alternate Gospel Reading for this service and thus a different sermon from the 6am service.

John’s description of the first Easter Sunday morning is very interesting. He begins with the phrase “on the first day of the week.” Mark in his Gospel is always saying ‘immediately’ implying things moving on rapidly while John in his entire Gospel is always telling us which day of the week things happened. Surely there must be a reason for this.

Easter has three different methods of numbering the day of the week on which the Resurrection happened. All three are intertwined with meanings: it is the **first day**, the **third day** and the **eighth day**. As the **first day** it is the day after Sabbath, it is the day creation started. As the **third day** it is the third day from the Crucifixion. As the **eighth day** it is the first day of a **new** week and is therefore the day of **new creation**. John has been piecing his gospel together in such a way that this day in chapter 20 is both first and eighth day. Traditional baptismal fonts tend to be eight-sided as a reminder that you are being baptized into new creation. Baptism and Easter go hand in hand as we will see when we baptise Chumnedum and we all renew our baptism vows.

Let’s go on...Mary is the first to the tomb on this day and she sees the stone is rolled away. She fetches Peter and John who race to the tomb; John is faster and gets there first! They both go in and see the tomb empty, the linens rolled up and the story says that John (the author) believed. He also says that they didn’t understand but he believed. This is worth thinking about too. Peter looks and doesn’t say much, Mary is suspicious and thinks Jesus’ body has been stolen but John believes. Interesting responses... which one would you align yourself with?

Meanwhile, Mary is still in the garden. She is weeping. Her Lord has been taken away. Two angels visit her and inquire about her crying and she tells them why. She turns and sees Jesus only she doesn’t see Jesus.

Have you ever experienced that? I have because most parishioners expect to see me only in church and in my uniform of clergy shirt and collar. So when I bump into a parishioner in a shopping centre away from Rondebosch they are often “don’t see me” – often they glare at me thinking why is this stranger greeting me, before the penny drops. So I can sympathise with Mary Magdalene. She sees Jesus but this is out of place, out of context because he is supposed to be dead. Instead he is living, he is standing, he is breathing and he is calling to her. She needs a moment before she can realize what is happening.

I love what John does next. He tells us that Mary thinks Jesus is the gardener. But think for a moment... isn’t he? I mean, the original vision in the Garden of Eden was for Adam and Eve to be the stewards of all creation and to care for the garden. Jesus is the Second Adam, the New Adam so isn’t it fitting that he is mistaken for being a gardener? He IS **the** gardener!

Jesus calls Mary by name and that is how he is revealed. She knows that voice, she knows that name, she knows the one who is speaking to her and so she turns to embrace him. Oh that we could embrace our Lord like that! Jesus first tells her not to embrace him but more importantly he commissions Mary to be the first bearer of Good News and to announce to his followers that he is alive.

Let’s think about being a witness. In 1st century Jerusalem it was unthinkable for a woman to be a witness. (If you believe any of the early beliefs that Mary was a prostitute—and I am not agreeing with those theories here—then you would have a doubly unfit witness). Surprise! Surprise! Jesus reveals himself as the Risen Lord first to a woman and has her go and spread the news. The Good News of Jesus is ushered forth from the Garden by the wrong person because God’s kingdom is full of all the wrong people.

What does she announce? “I have seen the Lord.” It is always simple with John. “Come and see.” “We would see Jesus.” “I have seen the Lord.” John uses that word “see” often to convey more than just something our eyes take in. How often haven’t you said to someone who is explaining something to you, “Oh right, now I see” You were seeing all the time but now you understand. That is what Jesus is conveying when John put those phrases into his

mouth. So, too here as Mary tells the disciples that she had seen the Lord – she had come to understand. Earlier as the three – Mary, Peter and John arrived at the tomb John had written: ⁹*for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.* What Mary is saying is now she understood...

The Archbishop of Canterbury recently told the church that its sole purpose was to evangelise others. And here we find the perfect rationalizations and mental constructions of evangelism put so simply by this unexpected first witness. “I have seen the Lord...” No complicated theology, just personal experience. Have you seen the Lord? Are willing to go to others and tell them that you have seen the Lord? Because that is what this Easter Gospel is all about because for them, they as yet do not understand the scripture, that Jesus must rise from the dead. And it is our job to help them to understand by the way we live our lives.