

## Sermon for Easter Sunday 2022

It was not what they expected, those women, going to the tomb to complete the precious work of preserving Jesus' body.

Just a stone rolled away from the entrance. That was disturbing.

Perhaps someone had found out somehow that Jesus was entombed there, and desecrated it. They prayed not.

One worked up the courage to look in. Was it Mary, or Joanna, or Mary from Magdala?

And again, what that brave one saw was not what she expected.

No body of the Teacher. Had someone stolen it? How awful would that be?

No body, but two persons there, or perhaps not persons, because they had an unusual look about them. Luminous. Not dusty. Not chilled by sitting in that cool cave of a tomb. Just...shiny. In a way no persons they knew were ever shiny.

By now, all the women were looking in, and they were frightened because this was not what they expected to see. These two were not who they expected to see.

Seeing their fright, the two said, "you came looking for the Teacher? He's not here. You know what he told you before Friday: after three days he would rise from the dead. This has happened. He is risen from the dead." This last part, smiling at them, reminding them of what good news this was.

And so, having found something other than what they expected, the women returned to the other disciples. The male disciples. The ones who hid while they stood at the foot of the cross on Friday. The ones who did not do the work of preparing a body. The ones who talked and talked and talked, as such persons are known to do.

And they told what they had found. The tombstone rolled away. The body gone. The shining ones telling them what they told them.

And the talking ones looked at them as if they were simple-minded. Foolish. Peter had to see for himself, because this could not be right, even though the women said this was precisely what Jesus had told them would happen. Didn't Peter remember Jesus' words?

But that was how Peter was, for good or for ill, so he too went to that cave and saw it was empty. Perhaps the shiny ones were still there and Peter couldn't perceive them –

isn't it often so that each of us see through different eyes even when we all are grieving? – or perhaps they had already gone, having delivered the message to the women. No matter: Jesus was risen, just as he had said he would do.

We can forgive the women for their fear in the moment they saw the stone rolled away. There were so many reasons that could have happened and almost all of them were bad – and the chance that the reason it was rolled away was so beyond comprehension they might not have thought of it until they were reminded by the shiny ones.

We can forgive them their shock at seeing those angelic and luminous creatures that sat in that space – they'd never seen anything like them before, and couldn't even find the words to describe them.

And we can even forgive Peter for his disbelief in the women's story – emotional females, we can imagine him saying – before stomping off to see for himself.

And then he saw, and then he knew it was true.

It's a strange and beautiful and unbelievable story, I know. Jesus, dying a broken human being on the cross, then coming back to life again, resurrected. Hard to comprehend how it could be, isn't it?

Can we forgive ourselves, though, our own doubts? I suspect that each of us, at one time or another, have struggled with the notion of the resurrection. We are people of science and education, and the miracle of this is not explained by science.

But as we struggle with trying to wrap our minds around this resurrection, we remember this: science is there to help us to understand the multitude of miracles around us. From the flowering of a bush, to the transformation of caterpillar into butterfly, to the birth of a baby, to the movement of the planets. They are all miracles. Science shows something of how they work, and we pride ourselves on our understanding. But some things are beyond our ability to structure an explanation. Some things are so beyond what we expect that there is no explanation that we can devise. God holds some of God's cards close to his chest...

That's the beauty of this day and this miracle and this Jesus Christ whose resurrection we celebrate this day. It cannot be reduced to a rational scientific answer. But we feel it, we know it in our bones and in our souls. So today, on this day when the one thing we don't expect has happened, when Jesus Christ has died and has then conquered death and has risen to invite us to believe in him, we do not need a whiteboard full of calculations, or descriptions of chemical reactions, or a philosophical treatise explaining it all...

...on this day when the one thing that could surprise us still in our jaded sophistication has happened, we should stop trying to understand it.

We stop trying to understand it just as we don't try to understand how we know we love someone, or why the grandchild just said the one perfect and unexpected thing we needed to hear, or where our souls go when our bodies have turned to dust. We stop trying to understand. We simply rejoice in this miracle that is the embodiment of God's love. We give thanks for it. We share it. And we say thank you. What more do we need to say?

Amen.