

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.³ They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark's Gospel

EASTER SUNDAY 2012 – The Rev Keith King

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

This is the familiar cry of Easter Day; but it is a far cry from the actual events of that Easter morning.

Our Easter cry is a cry created by a Christian community of a much later era. It is a triumphant cry of certainty linked to images of power, power over one's enemy.

It is indeed a far cry from the stories we listen to today.

These stories are full of ambiguity and uncertainty.

One who was clearly dead and buried now appears as life to those who love him – and I use the words 'appears as life'.

They are NOT stories of a dead man walking...

...they are stories of an experience that is almost beyond words and telling...

Each of the Gospel writers tells the story from a different angle and perspective.

Interestingly all of them agree that it is only women who are the first to enter into this experience of the Risen Christ – but that is for another sermon particularly the role of Mary Madeleine whom I am certain had a unique and highly intimate relationship with Jesus.

Mark's Gospel is the most straightforward of all the Resurrection narratives. Scholars tell us that this was probably the earliest of the stories and the others are all embellishments based on Mark.

Mark's telling of the story has one major difference to all the others and I think this adds to the authenticity of Mark's rendition especially in light of my understanding that these are not historical facts, but stories of experience and faith...

In Mark there is no Jesus. I will say that again – in Mark there is no Jesus!

All there is, is a man dressed in white and he instructs the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee and it is there that they will enter into the experience of the Risen Christ.

Galilee was the place where the disciples first encountered Jesus and it was here they grew to love and know him. Through the women the disciples were being told to 'go back' and to remember Jesus in familiar places once again, and it is there that they would 'see' him.

Pause

Remembering is a familiar theme in the spiritual journey.

Every time we share in communion together we are 'going back' we are 're-membering' the story of Jesus and the Last Supper he had with his friends, and in that re-membering, in that going back, we draw strength for the journey ahead.

CS Lewis in his famous series of books 'The Narnia Chronicles' picks up on this truth in his final book of the series, 'The Last Battle'.

In this book time is drawn in and those who can look Aslan, the Christ figure, in the eye are able to enter into the eternal realm.

But entering into the realm of Aslan is not the end...the journey continues. The call is 'onward and upward' and the travelers continue to journey into the centre of the realm.

At the centre is a hill at the top of which is a cairn, a marker, which is actually a stone well. When they peer inside a strange thing happens – they find themselves back where they started at the edge of the realm....
...but they notice it is subtly different.

The fragrances are more delicate; the colours are deeper; the sounds are richer...and the journey continues, 'onward and upward'....

T.S. Elliot in his famous poem 'Little Gidding' from the 'Four Quartets' also understands the truth of returning to our source and 'knowing' in a new and richer way.

He writes:

'We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time...'

Mark too knew this and that is why he puts those words into the mouth of the man dressed in white...

Pause

As I look through my journey there are four major points of meeting with the Risen Christ – places where I often return to Galilee...

The first was my baptism. I was five years old and remember it vividly; the water running over my face and the sign of the cross upon my forehead.

I re-member it often and each time there are new fragrances and colours.

It was from that time that I began to chat with God as my friend, and now I know it was from that time that I was part of the community of many millions of people who have chosen the way of Christ.

The second was at primary school. The Leprosy Mission came and showed a film of lepers in Africa.

I was deeply moved and for years was an avid supporter of the Leprosy Mission and its work.

This experience taught me to be thankful for my own health and wellbeing.

In later years I learnt of St Francis of Assisi who was sick to the stomach at the sight of a man with leprosy. But he managed to go over and kiss him and the sick man immediately became the living Christ.

Pause

The third was my first encounter with death.

I had to identify the body of a close relative who had been killed in an accident.

When I saw her on the cold slab I knew that I too was going to die – I was only in my early 20's at the time.

It was a sobering moment and one that propelled me into a new experience of the living God.

Pause

And the fourth was in that same year when I witnessed the death of a starving child in the arms of his distraught mother – all on the TV in the comfort of my living room.

Here again I saw the living Christ in all his distressing guises...

Pause

We will all have our 'Galilees, our places where we can go back and remember...

Pause

When were you first excited by the deep knowledge of God;

When were you moved in your gut and in your heart at the movement of the Christ - be it in joy or in pain;

The Easter story invites us to once again go back and re-member...

To experience the mystery that is the Living Christ

For Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!