

EASTER 2005

Nicky Ing - 27th March 2005

Acts 10:34-43; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28: 1-10

Wasn't it wonderful arriving here in the dark early this morning, there was a sense of expectation and excitement amongst us all, knowing why we had come here. But it is a funny feeling not to be able to recognise people easily in the dark...I remember one year going up behind someone (a tall man, whom I mistook for my husband!) and putting an arm round him in a rather over-friendly way! the person was, in fact, a total stranger to me..... and then I was embarrassed because I didn't know him after all!! I think he was pleased really, but also rather surprised!! (N.B. story a bit different at 8 am as it is light already.)

There is an ancient story in the Jewish tradition, about a rabbi who gathered all his students together very early in the morning while it was still dark. He told them to listen carefully because he had a very important question to ask them. The question was this: how could they tell when night had ended and the day was about to begin. One student answered: *'Could it be when you see an animal and can tell whether it is a sheep or a dog?'*

'No', said the rabbi.

Another student said: *'Could it be when you look at a tree in the distance and can tell whether it is a fig tree or an oak tree?'*

'No', said the rabbi...

After a few more guesses, all of which were wrong, the students demanded that he should tell them the answer.

The rabbi replied: ***'It is when you look on the face of any woman or man and see that she is your sister and he is your brother. Because, if you cannot do this, then no matter what time it is, it is still night.'***

As we heard in Matthew's Gospel this morning, the Easter story begins very early in the morning of the first day of the week, when it is still dark. The Easter that we celebrate today is an invitation out of darkness into the light of the risen Christ.....the Easter candle which we lit from the fire outside is a symbol for us, and a powerful one, showing us that in that light we see Jesus as risen Lord, and in that light we can recognise each other as brothers and sisters in the love of Christ. The light calls us back from standing near the empty tomb, and shows us, just as the angel showed Mary, to look for hope elsewhere. Because now that Jesus has overcome death, nothing and nobody can be written off as a lost cause.

All of the resurrection stories in the Gospels have one thing in common. God does something so strange and unexpected that there is no way to explain what happened. And because it is so strange, people respond to it in different ways.... Either in faith, in hope and love, or in disbelief. In one of the stories, Jesus is only recognised when he speaks....in another, he is not known when he speaks but when he breaks and blesses bread. In one story, he cooks fish for breakfast, and in another he suddenly appears in a locked room. We can't put together a kind of video of what happened....the stories are told by different people...with different perspectives and situations...but they are **real** experiences. Those first disciples had the advantage of seeing Jesus with their own eyes... But did that make faith any easier for them? When they had looked at Jesus what did they see?....in Jesus they saw a human being like themselves, but to believe that he was the son of God required a huge act of faith.

This accounts for the fact that there were many who heard Jesus speak and who saw him act, and who still did not believe in him. Even the apostles themselves, who had been with him from the beginning, are shown to be slow to believe. The shock they all experienced at his death on the cross also must have made it hard for them to believe he could have risen from the dead. But the powerful sermon preached by Peter in our Acts reading today and the way he speaks about his own experience of the risen Lord shows how the Resurrection had changed everything for the disciples, once they had accepted the reality of it for themselves, and they simply had to share the good news.

Where does all this leave us? We can't see Jesus the way the apostles saw him. We can't be in the upper room going over the events of Holy week when Jesus drops in...we can't put our finger in the wounds of Jesus, as Thomas did....we have to live by faith, and not by sight...but we, who gather in this church today....do we recognise Jesus? Do we hear him call us by name? Jesus is made known to us as we read Holy Scriptures, as we pray, as we receive the bread and the wine in the Eucharist, and as we enjoy the presence of our brothers and sisters here in this place. And, like Mary was, we too are called to share with others the good news of God in Jesus Christ who rose from the dead. So we need, I think, to look to the quality of our own seeing and our own hope, so that we too will have the love to enable us to see through the dark. In celebrating Easter we rejoice together in the light that darkness cannot overpower, and we celebrate that God raised Jesus from the dead and that he extends that homecoming to all of us. We thank God, too, for the faith that challenges us always to see more in other people because we love him. We can all catch something of the reality of the resurrection when we experience new life in the midst of hopelessness. We see it in hospital wards, when tired nurses and doctors reach out to bring people back from death...we see it in the people who risk their lives protesting against the mindless violence which is often inflicted on helpless victims... This resurrection life invites **us** to let Jesus help us to love again, even if our love has been rejected by someone. It helps us to trust again, even if we have been betrayed by another. Resurrection invites us to let Jesus help us to wipe away the tears, pick up the pieces of our shattered lives, and start again...it's the good news that the risen Jesus is among us, ready to work miracles for us, if we can just let him do so. It means that nothing can defeat us...not discouragement, or pain or even death. Paul says in today's second reading: **'When Christ is revealed.....AND HE IS YOUR LIFE....you too will**

be revealed in all your glory with him.' In the meantime, however, we all struggle to let some of that glory shine through our lives as we try to follow Jesus.

So I suppose we need to look to the quality of our own seeing, and our own hope: our faith..... so that we too, like Jesus, will receive the gift of love that enables us to see through the dark. In this kind of Easter faith we can begin to answer the question that we started with, the question the old rabbi asked... 'How can you tell when the night has ended and the day is on its way back?' We can tell when we can look at the face of our brother, or our sister, and see something wonderful and beautiful....we, too, you and I, can catch a glimpse of Jesus, the Messiah.

**Risen One,
Come, meet me
In the garden of my life.**

**Revive my silent hope;
Raise up my neglected gratitude.
Give new life to my faltering relationships.
Roll back the stone of my indifference.
Unwrap the deadness in my spiritual life,
Give me a new enthusiasm in my work.**

**Risen One, send me forth as a disciple of your unwavering love,
A messenger of your unlimited joy.**

**Resurrected One,
May I become ever more convinced
That your presence lives on,
And on, and on, and on..
Awaken me, Lord! Awaken me! (Poem...adapted from Joyce Rupp "Out of the Ordinary" p.84.)**

May the joy and peace which the risen Lord Jesus offers us be yours, and mine, as we celebrate his Resurrection today: and may we share that joy and peace with others so that they too may come to know his love in their lives. **AMEN**