

Sarah Shaw's - Sermon for Easter Day – 27th March 2016

Theme: Easter presents us with a choice. Not much has changed – or everything has changed.

'Nothing much has changed - except everything has changed'. So ran the advert for a particular mobile phone, launched last year. 'Nothing much has changed - except everything has changed'.

Faced with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead – we like the early disciples have a choice. We can choose to decide that nothing much has changed. Or we can choose to decide that everything has changed, and allow that to change us.

Our Easter liturgies and hymns overlook the period of fear and disbelief that the disciples went through, until they realised that everything *had* changed. We started our service today by stating with joy, 'Jesus Christ is risen today. He is indeed, Alleluia!' And in the Eucharistic prayer we will say 'In the first light of Easter, glory broke from the tomb and changed the women's sorrow into joy.' But in actual fact the first people to witness the empty tomb were scared. *Nothing*, initially, had changed for them. Those earliest witnesses absolutely believed Jesus was dead. They didn't expect anything else. In John's account which we heard today, Peter, and the other disciple, having heard Mary's report of the empty tomb and having gone to look themselves, simply returned to their homes. *Everything had* changed – but they didn't see it all at once.

For Mary too – who stayed weeping at the empty tomb, Jesus was dead, and this disappearance of his body just added to her grief. Three times Mary says in our reading 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and I don't know where they have laid him.' Once to the two disciples, once to the angels, and once to Jesus himself. But then, there is that moment. Mary speaks to Jesus, thinking he is the gardener, and he speaks her name. 'Mary!' And she knows at once that it is Jesus. Now, I don't think we can explain why Mary didn't recognise Jesus at first – I'm mistrustful of glib explanations. But it certainly seems that she who was immersed, inconsolable in her grief at Jesus' death and disappearance, is then so transformed by her

encounter with Jesus that she immediately goes back to the other disciples proclaiming with certainty 'I have seen the Lord.'

And of course we know from the accounts that it wasn't only Mary who met with Jesus. They all finally saw the Lord. And it changed *everything*. We heard in the reading from Acts, Peter, proclaiming boldly 'We are witnesses to all Jesus did.. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to those who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.' This is Peter. Peter, who denied knowing Jesus, who returned home after being at the empty tomb. Everything had changed! Once the disciples met with the risen Jesus what else could they do keep telling people – even at the risk of being killed. Wouldn't it have been easier if they'd chosen to say nothing?

And what about us? What does the resurrection change for us?

The early disciples didn't expect the resurrection – that was the last thing on their minds. And we sometimes, I think, act like this - don't really expect anything to change in the light of all that Jesus did. The stone is firmly in front of the tomb. But our faith is not a cult of the crucified Christ, a remembrance of a good man - but is a *living* faith, in the one who we can meet with *now* – and expect that encounter to change us. We are called to *experience* the resurrection in our lives – not just to believe in it. Jesus asked Mary 'For whom are you looking?' We need to look and be prepared to see Jesus. We need to prepare our hearts for insights that don't make sense to our minds. Our faith isn't based on knowing *about* Jesus – it's about knowing him. It's about loving him and serving him in others. It's about meeting Jesus now and allowing everything to be changed. And it is not an event with a simple before, during and after – it is effective for the past, present and future. A past put behind us, new life in the present, and a new hope for the future. The resurrection is an eternal act, and it is for the whole world.

The promises we make at our baptism, and will renew in a moment, *are effective* – change happens when we make them a reality. The fruit of our new life in Christ encompasses all that is life giving - continuing in the Apostles' teaching; breaking

bread; praying together; proclaiming the good news –of the past behind us, of new life, of a new hope. Working for justice and peace. This our calling. But we are not called to be superheroes. Just ordinary women and men who know our need of God. And who can be ordinary for other people – *yet* proclaim peace, new life, new hope. This is not an easy path of course – it wasn't for Jesus and it can't be for us.

I wonder if you heard the terrible news report of the shopkeeper killed in Glasgow last Thursday. A well-known and well-loved man throughout Shawlands, he had posted on social media messages promoting peace between faiths and people, and on Thursday, a message to all Christians wishing them a happy Easter. This Muslim man has been killed by a man who, it is thought, didn't like the shopkeeper's messages of peace.

What can the resurrection say to us, in relation to this tragedy? Harry Williams, the priest, monk and theologian wrote 'Resurrection changes our lives because death separates and life unites.' Death separates and life unites. I think that is so beautifully and simply put. We see the truth of the resurrection in the way that so many local people have responded – in peace, with love, and in solidarity – holding vigils, laying flowers, and speaking out about this killing - people of many faiths and of no faith, of different ethnic backgrounds, and ages. The reality of this terrible death cannot be ignored – yet, life unites. And the dead man's life-giving words have lived on beyond his death – death cannot silence truth.

Easter. Resurrection. Everything has changed – past, present and future. But we have a choice. Choosing to allow the resurrection to change us means meeting the living Christ, and asking him to govern our lives.

Faced with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead – we like the early disciples have a choice to make. Nothing much has changed – or everything has changed. What do you choose?