

SERMON PREACHED AT SJH EASTER DAY YEAR B 1 APRIL 2018

Here we are. Alleluia! We are celebrating God raising his Son from the dead. For those of us who have kept Lent in some appropriate way, and especially if we have been through the re-enacting in church of events from the last supper onwards, there should be a great sense of joy today. Day has dawned after a very dark night.

It was before dawn on the day after the Jewish Sabbath that Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb. She was taken aback to discover the stone had been removed, and naturally assumed someone had taken Jesus' body away. It was only later, when Jesus came to her and spoke her name that the truth dawned. She went and told the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." The church gives her the title 'apostle to the apostles' – an apostle being someone who is sent.

S. Paul was a late joiner to the ranks of the apostles, but his writings are some of the earliest in the New Testament. They show how belief that Jesus was raised on the third day was central to the Christian good news. It was part of the tradition that was handed on to Paul by those who had been followers before him. In the opening verses of the great 15th chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians Paul recounts a number of Jesus' resurrection appearances. He focusses on Christians' experience of the risen Christ rather than on the question which is often asked today: was the tomb empty? His answer would probably have been, "Well of course it was." But his message is that the important question is about Christ being a real presence in believers in the present day rather than the how and what of the first Easter Sunday.

S. Peter, speaking to Cornelius and other Gentiles, also refers to Jesus appearing, not to all the people, but to those whom he had chosen, those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. But experience of the risen Christ is not limited to those who were his followers:

...everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

I think it is a valid question to ask if the resurrection is a decisive victory over evil, why the world is not a better place than it was before our Lord's saving act. Why do we still have abominations like Syria? Why is nerve agent used in attempted assassinations? Why are social media used for harmful purposes? Perhaps the answer is that the resurrection has always been a transforming event for those with faith, with eyes to see, but not for the world in general. The resurrection is a cause of joy for the church, but comes with the need to live it and proclaim it. If you are in church this morning, you should be joyful! We must start with ourselves!