

Prayer

Introduction ...

If most people were asked "When is Easter?", I suspect that they'd look in their diary and tell you one or two dates – this year – the 3rd & 4th April. The church answer, however, is to say the 40 days from Easter Sunday to Ascension Day.

And one reason that this is important is that Easter is massive! The resurrection of Jesus was too big for the disciples to comprehend it all in one go ... there were so many questions, misunderstandings, so much to get heart and head around. It took them time ... and it's no bad thing if – this year in particular – it takes us time.

Early ...

What were the disciples to make of it What are we to make of it ??? "It" being Jesus after the resurrection

Could it be a resuscitated body? That somehow, he'd recovered from the crucifixion? Well, not if going through locked doors is anything to go by! Maybe that's what Mary – in John's Gospel - was being told when she was instructed **not to hold on to him**.

Now, when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, as we read in John 11 – Lazarus was a 'resuscitated body' – and he would go on to die again. Not so for Jesus. He was not appearing to his disciples as a resuscitated body.

Could it be a ghost ... somehow the spirit or 'essence' of a dead person travelling from the life beyond back to earth? Well, not if eating broiled fish is anything to go by! And after all, some of the Jews already believed in life through and beyond death so a ghost or spirit – probably nothing totally new

No – **something radically different** is going on ... the resurrection of Jesus is not the resuscitation of his body ... and nor is it the ghost or essence of Jesus being present here ... nor is it simply that he is alive in spirit form after physical death. It's more complex and more wonderful that that ... no wonder the disciples struggled to grasp what was going on before their very eyes.

Remember – the Jews were hoping for, praying for, God's reign to be established ... and expected it to **be immediate** when it happened. Out with the old and in with the new in an instant ... but that was not how God chose to act. Instead – the resurrection of Jesus is the start of a new age, a new era ... St Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 describes Jesus' resurrection as the "first-fruits". In his resurrection, Jesus shows us that there is a new **embodied life** for this world – as well as for the world to come. And so he can commission his disciples to continue his work in this world – to be his witnesses.

They are **not to return to** life as it was before the resurrection – they are still to follow Jesus – but **in new ways**. They are not to concentrate only on life through and beyond death – they are to be the resurrected new body of Jesus on earth

So for us – what are we to make in 2021 of the resurrection of Jesus?

Well, yes – we can have great confidence in the life through and beyond death for loved ones who have died and for ourselves when that time comes. This is a really important aspect – and one in which I'm sure our Queen is drawing on for comfort, strength and hope as can all who are bereaved ... but there's so much more ... which is particularly meaningful as we move into the next few months and years – hoping that these will be post-Covid times for us.

How does Jesus long for us to be his new life, his embodied presence?

Although the circumstances are so different from the first century, I believe there is a message here **for us not to be backward looking** ... not to try and re-capture the past but to look to Jesus and travel to the future with him. How are we to be witnesses to his new life in the here and now?

As I was preparing this, it struck me that Zoom and other such computer programmes have enabled us in a sense to 'go through' locked doors. I know that could sound flippant – but I don't mean it to be!

We have been learning things through the last year:

Things about the interconnectedness of our world ... that no-one is safe unless all are safe ... and I hope that we don't lose this insight – and indeed that it widen to include the whole created order – not just human kind.

We've learnt things about living as Jesus' disciples: about witnessing in new ways: pastoral care, Christian outreach and nurture; prayer and worship too. That's not to say that we won't be interacting with each other in a much more face-to-face way ... but we need to take time to learn from Jesus what wisdom we need to live out that we've learnt during the last year –

Let's pray about this, individually and together, over this **long Easter season** to listen to what the Spirit is saying to us as individuals ... and to us as a church. Still in our time, in this decade, we are witnesses that Jesus is alive ... how will we embody this? **Amen**