

Easter Sunday sermon

What happened? Ask a dozen people who experienced the same incident and you will get a dozen different answers: and their own answers will probably differ if you ask them in a group or privately. Anyone tasked with taking minutes in an important meeting knows that responsibility of recording accurately what took place – and the power that comes with it. I was watching *In The Loop* last week – the film version of the political comedy *The Thick of It* – which, if you can bear the ripe language is such a telling and excruciating satire. One of the politicians was applying the red pen to minutes of a vital meeting saying – this is what we ought to have said: the minutes need to record what should have happened – the correct version...

What is fake news and what is true is, we are constantly reminded, becoming an extremely blurred boundary. So here we are on Easter Day, with greatest news ever reported, the telling and receiving of which changed the course of history. Whether you believe it or not, in fact. Christianity went out into the ancient world not with the news of Jesus' teaching, but of his resurrection. That's why we are sat here today.

Yet the resurrection of Christ is deeply perplexing to most people, appearing as it does to suspend the natural order of things - where you're born, you die and that's it. That's the way it has always been; that's the way it was with Jesus, except that the Christians will insist on not leaving it there. For those making films or musicals about Jesus, this is the bit they don't know how to portray, because there is literally nothing else to compare the resurrection to: nothing to make it familiar or normal.

All the more odd, then, that this of all events in Jesus' story should read most like eyewitness testimony, like news being reported. Those odd snatches of memory about Mary thinking Jesus to be the gardener, the random details like the other disciple outrunning Peter to the tomb; it doesn't sound invented. And it's especially ironic that the one thing which most keenly tests the faith of those who struggle to believe today is the very aspect of following Jesus that didn't require much faith at the time. For those disciples who saw the risen Christ – and they all did eventually – even Thomas, the resurrection didn't require any faith at all – because it just happened and they saw him and touched him.

Faith, as we know, is the assurance of things we hope for and being certain of things not seen. As Jesus will say to Thomas, 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

Following Jesus in the first place – that took faith; being sent out to preach and heal in his name - that took faith; sticking with him in Jerusalem when it all fell apart – that took faith – or it would have done if they done it. The resurrection, on the other hand is just presented to them. It goes from being simply unbelievable to being unavoidable – there's no halfway house of faith.

The empty tomb is a piece of breaking news that Mary dashes back with; and it is because of her, that we are here today; for her news is passed to others who run and then encounter the risen Christ for themselves – and so it has come down to us, so many centuries later. Mary Magdalene is such an important figure in Christian history – if it was her at Bethany anointing Jesus' feet (and it may well have been), it is somehow appropriate that the woman who foresaw the significance of Jesus' burial, would be the first to witness his resurrection.

So yes, the resurrection is deeply perplexing, but it is also something given, which you don't make true by believing in it; it's not like an especially tough piece of meat that we have to chew and chew until finally, with a great deal of effort, we can swallow. The resurrection is news: you can believe it or not, but if you do - if you take the gospels at their word, and try living out a life based on the resurrection - you may just find it making sense of everything.

Because the Bible suggests that it is not just something that happened once to Christ, but something which is also at work in us. The victory of Christ over all that is deadly is not just his, it is also ours. And if we insist on the truth that, in Christ, life wins, then this begins to permeate everything we do: every personal cul-de-sac and desperate dead-end; every political impasse or relational breakdown. All may become places of transformation in the light of Easter Day.

So the challenge of Easter Day is not so much *can you believe it?* as *will you believe it? Will you* choose to live as if Christ is risen and be a people for whom life and hope have the last word? And who are prepared to count the cost of being the hope that the world so urgently needs. If so, everything changes.