

PEACE BE UNTO YOU

1st Sunday after Easter

John 20. 19-23.

Today's reading begins with the words, *The same day at evening...* prompting me to ask, the same day as what? So, back I go to John's Gospel to find out what went before.

The chapter begins, *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed.* The day is therefore the third day after the death of Jesus by crucifixion.

Late on Friday evening the body was taken down from the cross, it was hastily wrapped with spices in linen cloths and laid in an empty tomb that happened to be nearby. According to John, it was Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus the Pharisee who did this. The following day was the Sabbath, a day of great solemnity when religious observance precluded any other activity, so it was just before dawn the next day that Mary went to the tomb. Finding the stone removed she ran to fetch Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, and they entered the tomb and found it empty. The linen wrappings were discarded and there was no sign of the body. They returned to their homes but Mary lingered. She met someone she thought was a gardener and then she discovered that it was indeed the risen Lord. One can hardly imagine her joy as she told the disciples about what she had just witnessed.

The same day at evening they are gathered in a locked room, afraid for their own safety. But what else are they feeling?

Grief, surely, for the loss of someone very dear to them.

Shock? It has all happened so suddenly and so violently.

Perplexity? Can they really believe Mary's story – might she not have imagined it as an expression of her own grief?

Uncertainty? They know that the body is not in the tomb, but what has happened to it?

And suddenly Jesus is with them, greeting them with the familiar phrase, *Peace be unto you.* They are understandably dumb-struck, so he repeats his greeting and then shows them the wounds he has received. Now they must be overjoyed, but still incredulous. How has he escaped death on the cross? How is it that he is able to move about freely, in spite of his wounds?

Well, at that point they probably don't realise the full significance of all that has happened, even though Jesus tried to prepare them. However, quite clearly there has been a profound change in Jesus. He has died and has risen from the dead, as he said he would, and now his time on earth is coming to an end. In a matter of weeks he will ascend to his Father in heaven, and it will be left to the disciples to establish his church on earth. So we see him being very business-like. He breathes on them and confers the power of the Holy Spirit

to forgive sins, and suddenly we remember that Jesus quite often used to heal the sick and the distressed with the words, *Your sins are forgiven.*

In the days and weeks ahead the disciples will remember many of the things that he taught them. They will remember many incidents too from their time together, and they will remember the man they came to love. In time they will find peace in their hearts too, for this man is indeed the Prince of Peace.

The Revd Canon David Crawley

Cathedral Chaplain