

Dear Friends,

It's going to be a very strange Easter this year. My diary is still full of services but we know that they won't happen. We shall all be celebrating Easter at home in a way that none of us will have known before.

On Good Friday the situation seemed to be hopeless, it was completely irretrievable, there was nothing that could be done about it. Jesus had been killed, there was no doubt about that, there were enough eyewitnesses to convince any court of law and any doubter. The disciples were in a state of deep shock, they were totally confused and beginning to lapse into despair. All their hopes and dreams had been shattered, their whole world had collapsed around them. They had lost their leader and inspiration who was also their friend and the future looked very bleak indeed. Would the authorities come for them as well? They could be next in line.

The women went to the tomb early on Sunday morning to anoint the body. No doubt they were in despair and mourning the loss of their leader and friend. When they reached the tomb where Jesus was buried they found it was now empty. Not only that, they were told the amazing truth, the reason it was empty was because Jesus was alive. They were told that they shouldn't look for the living among the dead.

This was such an amazing truth, such an amazing turnaround, they couldn't really work it out and probably couldn't really believe it either. The disciples certainly didn't believe what the women had to say, they said quite bluntly it was a load of nonsense. We can understand their attitude, they were in no mood for playing games, for false optimism or for idiotic ideas.

The empty tomb is a central feature of the resurrection stories. Some people argue that it was a later invention added in to make the story more convincing. But the empty tomb was part of the story from very early on. It was certainly an important part of the Easter story well before any of the gospels were written. The first disciples also wouldn't have been able to understand the idea that the tomb wasn't empty.

The empty tomb is an important feature of the gospel accounts of the resurrection. But the empty tomb doesn't prove that the resurrection is true. Nor do the resurrection appearances that we're told about. Nor do the gospel records that we have in front of us. Nor does the transformation of the disciples from depressed and frightened men into fearless and inspired preachers and leaders. Nor does the history of the church and its continued expansion through the centuries.

None of these things prove the truth of the resurrection, they are all pointers rather than proofs. They all point in the direction of the truth, the amazing truth that Jesus is alive today. We can't prove that the resurrection is true. There is no precise theoretical proof that we can put forward for examination. We couldn't prove it to the satisfaction of a court of law, though no-one could disprove it either.

The crucial and decisive fact is that Jesus is alive, he is alive today, and we can meet him today. Countless millions of people have recognised that truth, they have followed the pointers, the gospel accounts, the experience of Christians through the centuries. They have followed the

pointers and have discovered for themselves the amazing truth that Jesus is alive and active in the world today. He is with us today even though we must meet in our homes and not in our churches. May we each in our own experience meet with the risen Jesus and know beyond doubt that he is alive.

With best wishes this Easter,

Mark