

SERMON

Rollercoaster of Easter

One of the programmes that I have watched on television recently is that series on sleep. I have not caught them all, but some of the people have terrible problems. Not getting to sleep but when they are asleep. For some it is snoring that keeps their partners awake, some were pacing the room half the night, some would ride horses or seem to be, in bed, and one gentleman threw himself around so much that he would crack ribs or break bones. And of course these people would never wake refreshed, but feel tired all day.

We all wake up differently. Some are energetic when they wake, others are useless until after breakfast. Some wake happy and cheerful, some are like Marvin the Paranoid Android from the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and wake up very grumpy and down. On that first Easter Sunday, I wonder how the disciples were felling and especially Peter. Remember what had happened to him a few days earlier. Matthew 26:69, page 998

“Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said. But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!” After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.” Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” Immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the cock crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.”

(Matthew 26:69-75 NIV)

Peter had felt fear on the Thursday night/Friday morning. It is too easy to condemn him, but do we not feel the same as we see that opportunity to say something about Christ to a friend or neighbour or work colleague. There is that fear of owning up as being a Christian.

And Peter would probably also have felt despair, some self-loathing because he had let Jesus down. He had denied him and then let him down, but we know that he was forgiven. I know many who feel they are not good enough for God. There was a lady who lived near us, who came to church and in her latter years was suffering from dementia. She would say to me, “I must a really bad person because God isn’t letting me die and go to heaven.” Of course that was rubbish, but we too can have that belief tape, that wrong belief tape going round inside our head, and this is because at times we find it harder to forgive ourselves than God finds it to forgive us. Jesus forgave Peter his denial, we too can know forgiveness for anything we do or do not do that is against God.

So we move on in the story of Easter and it does not get better. John 19:28, page 1088

“Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:28-30 NIV)

Jesus was now dead. The one on whom all their hopes were pinned. The one they had followed for three years, got to know well, listened attentively to what he had to say. Now he was gone. Feeling of bereavement, of intense sadness of loss, of direction and purpose. What were they to do now that Jesus had gone?

At times in our lives we can feel directionless, with that feeling of loss and bereavement. When one come to the end of an era, an end of one particular work that one was doing for God, but either one has become too old to continue in the role or the role has ceased to happen, the need is no longer there. It is so easy then to feel that there is no purpose, no direction and one is left with the feeling of loss, of bereavement.

Of course we know for the disciples that they may have felt like that on Friday, but Sunday was coming. So often we do not realise that as God closes one door, that he then opens another, as long as we recognise it. Notice that the disciples seemed to have stayed together. Remember that they were and disparate group from many different backgrounds who naturally would not have been together, but they were and so they were going to work through their loss as a group.

So often when we feel like that we can cut ourselves off from others and so it makes the feelings even worse. This is not the way to do, but to find that new work that God has prepared and planned for you to do! The disciples had a complete change in direction, eventually, but they were not to know that, we too can often find that happen to us.

So events move on. Matthew 28:1, page 1000

“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.” (Matthew 28:1-8 NIV)

They were afraid, but elated at the same time. Weird feelings, but we are wired that way. The rollercoaster ride at the funfair is one where we can feel great elation and fear at the same time. In fact it seems to be the fear that causes the elation!

But these women were so happy – Jesus had risen. The man they had gone to finish off the embalming on, because the men had done it in a hurried on the Friday before Sabbath began at 6.00pm had not done it properly, because of time constraints and because they were men. Preparing a person for burial was something that women did, not men, so the women were returning that Sunday morning to finish the job off properly!

What great joy though – Jesus was not there, Jesus had risen. When we see God at work, or he speaks to we get very excited. I hope that you do get excited when God is speaking to you or you see God at work, just like those ladies did on that particular Sunday. Anyone near that day would have seen several women enter with heads downcast, probably dragging their footsteps entering the burial site, to then seeing the same women running away excited and overjoyed – not the usual reaction one expects on a visit to the local cemetery!!!

So the women rush back to tell the disciples, all excited. Luke 24:9, page 1061

“When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.” (Luke 24:9-12 NIV)

Would you believe it, there are the women all excited and the men just pour cold water on their excitement. Doesn't sound like men at all! From elation to frustration for the women – why can they not believe us? How many times have you been on a high and then along comes the wet blanket? It has happened to us all at one time or another but it still hurts, it still can rob us of the joy we have and so we must be careful if we are pessimistic sort, not to rain on someone else's parade. We may just say that we are being realistic – that is probably what the disciples thought – no-one comes back from the dead, the women must be seeing and hearing things. Take care with this kind of thinking because God can do amazing things! For starters he saved you and me and decided to put us in the same church to work together for him. Just that is amazing to start with.

But the men, the disciples, they were still down in the dumps, still mourning the loss of their friend, and a resurrection was not on their agenda, so they probably ridiculed the idea, but they remained open enough to go and have a look. John 20:19, page 1089

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”
(John 20:19-23 NIV)

Joy, they were overjoyed. They had been through so many emotions in those few short days. Despair, fear, self-loathing, loss, sadness, bereavement, disbelief and now great joy – a real rollercoaster of emotions. If the Bank Holidays had been around then, they would have needed the Bank Holiday to recover. Going through so many emotional ups and downs can be stressful and draining of energy, although they end up on the right note. The men join the women – I hope the men apologised for their disbelief of the women – in their great joy and excitement – Jesus has returned from the dead. It was a real rollercoaster ride of emotions.

But where are you?

- Are you perhaps feeling a loss or self-hating – I'm not good enough – at the moment. God is still with you. God is there in your loss, God is loving you, not hating you, God will forgive you when we repent, when we tell him of our wrong he will forgive.
- Perhaps you have feeling of disbelief. You have heard about Jesus, about his death and resurrection and you just cannot believe it. Frank Morison wrote a book called *Who Moved the Stone?* which is available at Amazon and as a lawyer, Frank Morison set out to write an exposé on how impossible the trial and resurrection was but, after an exhausting study, the book he actually wrote was the opposite. As one book reviewer said: "Just like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes – Mr. Morison showed logically and diligently that after all the facts have been weighed, the solution that is supported by those facts – however unlikely it may sound or look – would have to be the truth." If you have disbelief, be like the disciples, be like Frank Morison and have a real look. The disciples went to the tomb to look for themselves, Frank came to the conclusion that Jesus did rise from the dead. But you owe it to yourself to look for yourself.

- Maybe though this morning you are elated, you are very, very happy, you are overjoyed because you know Jesus – the best friend you can ever have. I would hope then that you are so overjoyed that you tell others. Introduce people to God who brings you so much joy. Would others know you are overjoyed?

Easter – the rollercoaster of emotions – hopefully ending up with great joy that we have in God.