

## St Mary's Church, Linton Easter Day 17 April 2022

One folded handkerchief and one spoken word is all it took for two people, a man and a woman, to be convinced of Jesus' resurrection. Well probably not all it took for them to believe in the reality of the transformation of life which Jesus had spoken of during his life. But like many things in life these were tipping moments when suddenly things became clearer, and as the saying goes, the penny drops, when things click together. Much like when I struggled with a maths problem at school and then when the teacher had suggested another way of looking at it, returning to the problem and seeing it again, then there was that 'aha' moment, the 'aha, *now* I understand, *now* I get it!'

Understanding Jesus' resurrection is problematic. If *all* you focus on is the empty tomb and what kind of body the resurrected Jesus had, then much like my experience of doing maths problems you might find yourself going off at tangents, which although interesting will not lead to a deeper understanding of what the resurrection really means.

So how can a folded handkerchief help us understand the meaning of the resurrection? It begins with a race between the disciple whom Jesus loved, the Beloved Disciple, and Peter. Mary Magdalene reports that the large rolling stone across the entrance to the tomb has been rolled away and she suspects that someone has removed his body. That's enough to prompt the race, a bit of male macho-behaviour to see who can outrun the other. The BD gets there first, after all he is Jesus' favourite. He peeps into the cave, but generously he allows Peter actually to enter into it. Peter sees the linen bands strewn on the floor of the tomb, but he misses one crucial detail. The handkerchief or face covering for Jesus' body is *folded* and rolled up neatly. Would a tomb robber have been quite so careful?

But for the BD this is the detail which causes the penny to drop, he 'sees and believes'. Everything clicks into place and Jesus' life and teaching transform the way he sees the world and his own life. We can't know exactly what he now knew, but it must have been the realisation that Jesus' teaching that death is *not* the defining moment of our lives, is indeed true. Those who *really* think death is the defining moment of our existence must inevitably come to the conclusion that everything we do must be either pointless or ultimately meaningless. But having a resurrection 'aha moment' is to see beyond a merely material world, to a world of beauty, purpose, joy and love. Jesus called this dimension eternal life. So, it is not really the neatly folded handkerchief

which the BD sees physically, what he 'sees' in a deeper more profound sense of understanding is that resurrection is life in all its fulness.

And what of Mary? After the BD and Peter return to their respective homes, Mary is left by the tomb. She also looks into the cave or tomb and sees. But what she sees she interprets in everyday physical terms. The two angels she thinks are two men, possibly members of the group who have taken Jesus' body. Then she sees Jesus, but assumes he is the gardener, and she asks him almost the same question as she did of the angels, 'If you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him'. Then Jesus says one word, 'Mary'.

The world changes, Mary no longer sees it in physical terms. What she now 'sees' or experiences is the resurrected Jesus, a reality so powerful that it is almost tangible. She calls him rabbouni, a very unusual term which in Jewish literature is reserved only when addressing God as teacher. Mary's experience of resurrection is therefore one of a deep spiritual and emotional relationship with God.

In his parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus had said that he as the Good Shepherd calls each of us, his sheep, by name. Our name is who we are. At baptism we are given a name to signify that God is not an abstract idea, but someone with whom we have a personal relationship. In the OT, God says, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, and you are mine' (Isaiah 43:1). So, the one spoken word, 'Mary' is Mary's 'aha' moment, that is what resurrection means to her.

So I wish you all a very happy and joyous Easter and may you find in the resurrection your moment of transformation, your 'aha' moment when you experience the risen Christ in your own particular and personal way.

Michael Wilcockson