

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Readings: Acts 10:34-43

John 20:1-18

Date: Sunday 27 March 2016 – Easter Day

May I add my greetings to Sue's and wish you all a very Happy Easter.

We have had a great build up this year: the children from the school were in on Monday and Tuesday, creating pennants for the bunting. We talked with them about the events of Holy Week and they then created a design using stickers, words and their own drawings. There are over 200 individual contributions.

On Thursday, we celebrated the Last Supper, with 25 people sitting down for a bring and share meal. We noted the bread and wine as we passed them to one another and the washing of feet as we thought about Jesus' supreme act of service, the impending laying down of his life.

On Friday, we welcomed families from the village to Messy Easter and we gave away nearly 30 pizza boxes. There were craft activities to reinforce the Easter message and in the pizza boxes, were stories, further crafts, and prayers for families to enjoy over the Easter holidays. There was even a take-away Jesus who would be with them wherever they go over the next 14 days.

In the afternoon, we travelled the final moments of Jesus life with him in words and images from a contemporary

Stations of the Cross. Haunting pictures of the agony and the suffering and the awesome reality of his dying and of his death.

And today, we come to Easter Day, the day of resurrection. After a quiet, holy, but somewhat empty, Saturday, we arrive in a beautifully decorated church, to remind ourselves that Good Friday is not the end of the story, to celebrate the fact that that Christians still believe that death could not hold him and that he was and is risen from the dead. The Easter message is very simply this: Jesus is alive.

And it's this extraordinary discovery that I want to speak about briefly this morning, as I tell you that I have had an extraordinary discovery myself this week.

The story in John 20 is a very familiar one and there's lots of running involved. Early in the day, Mary goes to the tomb. She sees that the stone is removed. She runs to Peter and John. She tells them that Jesus has been removed. But she doesn't know where he is. Peter and John run to the tomb. Maybe it's the adrenalin of the panic they have seen in Mary, but they run too. They run fast and one runs faster than the other and gets there first. He looks in but doesn't go in. The second one to arrive does go in.

John from outside and Peter from inside see something in the tomb. And what they see when they get there changes their lives for ever. And what they see is nothing. They are expecting to see something and they actually see nothing.

And it's the nothing which brings change and transformation.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in and he saw and believed.

I want to tell you about my garage. A few months ago Kathryn and I sorted it out. We spent a whole day. We got everything out onto the front garden. We took some stuff to the tip. We put other stuff back. We left it clean and tidy and all looking very good. This is a few months ago.

One afternoon very recently, the sun was shining, it was beautifully warm and while Kathryn and Sue went off to the gym, I went to the garage to get the lawn mower out to cut the grass for the first cut of the season.

I opened the door and I stood there and, from outside, I looked in. Then I went in. And I looked around. I moved a few things and then I stood still. From outside and from inside, I saw nothing. Where the lawnmower should have been, where we had left it just a few short weeks ago after our grand day's tidying up, there was nothing. It simply wasn't there. And gradually it dawned on me: someone had stolen our mower. They had stolen the mower and the petrol can that went with it. They'd left everything else of value in there. Nothing else had been touched. But the mower was gone.

The square of concrete was there where the mower usually sat. But the mower itself was gone. This was quite a discovery for me, quite an experience for me – we have

very rarely had to deal with the police and with insurance companies over theft.

It all felt really weird. I was looking but I couldn't see what I was expecting to see. Peter and John couldn't see what they were expecting to see. They could see the linen cloths, but the body was gone. They saw nothing and it was that nothing which would change their lives for ever.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in and he saw and believed.

Of course, with the mower, this would now explain the open garage door Kathryn had found about a month ago early one morning. It would explain the gardening gloves on the ground which I spotted earlier in the week. It all made sense suddenly as I stood there and I began to understand what must have happened.

As Peter and John looked around and saw nothing, all the pieces of the jigsaw fell into place ... the one who had called them, the one they called teacher, the one who healed people and the one who performed miracles ... the one who had told them – why on earth had they not properly listened or understood when he had made it so plain – the one who had told them that he would be put to death and rise again ... this one, this Jesus was not there. He was not dead. He was alive. They began to understand what must have happened.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in and he saw and believed.

There was a survey done this last week where people were invited to speak about their believing. It turns out that more people than you would think actually believe this gospel stuff, this Jesus story. It's just that they don't so readily connect with church. They do believe but that believing is an individual thing, a private thing, a thing between them and God, almost a secret thing.

And that's fine ... but wouldn't it be great, wouldn't churches be different, wouldn't communities be different, wouldn't nations be different, wouldn't the world be different, if the message about Jesus' resurrection, the message about his being alive again was out there, clearly confidently and often? Wouldn't it be great if the people who believe it joined together to make a difference, to live the sacrificial life Jesus' foot washing pointed to; to live the serving life that said it wasn't all about me; to live the generous life which gave rather than got; to live the hopeful and joy-filled life that stands against those who live in fearfulness and despair. Wouldn't it be great?

Resurrection is not just about me and what I make of these stories in the privacy of my own home or in my own head. It's about transformation and the beginning of a whole new world order. It's the start of the future life now. It's the hope and promise of God himself. It's about us, not about you or me on our own.

Friends, thank you for coming to worship and celebrate with us this Easter. May our seeing and believing lead to acting and doing. Because if it's just all theory, we might as

well pack up, go home and wait for him to come again and roll the whole thing up. We were never meant to be just warehoused for heaven.

We are to be available for action. There's a world to be won and people out there to seek and to save. Mary, Peter and John really understood that and from that moment on began to live it out. And do you know what, so can we? And the message that Jesus is alive is where it all begins.

Let's pray ...