

Believe and Experience Resurrection.

John, the 'beloved disciple' tells us himself why he wrote his Gospel. (John 21:30-31)

Slide - Quote

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John wants us to have life and as he reminds us elsewhere, that life is life to the very fullest, a life of grace blessed by God.

Every story, every eye-witness account, the recurring themes and signs and sayings are all written so that we might believe in Jesus and by doing so have life in his name.

John doesn't want us to have just an academic or intellectual faith (important though understanding is) he wants us to experience the life of faith in a real and personal way.

I don't think he would have any objection to the intellectual statements of faith we use like the creed, but he would want us to KNOW Christ, to experience Christ, to have a personal relationship that is as much about our senses as it is our understanding. And so he writes what he writes with that objective in mind.

All of this reminded me of a song from the musical "My Fair Lady". Eliza Doolittle, the flower girl with a rough colloquial way of speech, is taken and educated not only

in her speech but also in the ways of being a lady. A young chap called Freddie falls hopelessly in love with her. Can anyone remember the song he sings as he walks near her house???

(I have often walked on this street before, but the pavement's always stayed beneath my feet before, all at once am I, several stories high, knowing I'm on the street where you live.....)

But this angers Eliza who is sick of just WORDS – and this is what she sings....

Slide - (Song extract)

*(Words words words I'm so sick of words!
Don't talk of love SHOW ME)*

"Don't talk of love show me".

If the Apostle John wandered into our film club and saw My Fair Lady I think he would say YES – that's right, don't just talk about faith, experience it, live, show it, **feel it!** The love of Jesus experienced is better than love just talked about.

When it comes to his account of Easter Sunday, how does John tackle intellectual belief and experiencing the faith?

John doesn't write his Gospel as if he's going to pull a rabbit out of the hat; it's not a thriller. He's writing to the church who already know that Jesus was raised from the dead just as we do...

Slide - acclamation

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Me - Alleluia, Christ is risen!

All - He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

We know it and John's church knew it. So why does he recount the events in the way that he does?

John loves his themes, and one is light and dark. It occurs again and again. Jesus declaring I am the light of the world. Nicodemus coming to Jesus in the dark of night – here it is again – the story begins while it was still dark.

In the darkness of her sorrow and loss Mary finds the tomb open and empty. She runs and tells Peter and John.

They race to the tomb and John recalls that he arrived first – but he doesn't go in. We learn the tomb has a low entrance, he bends and looks in and sees the linen cloths. How can he see if it's dark? Perhaps by now the dawn is beginning to lighten the sky?

Peter arrives and behaves typically. No messing about he walks straight into the tomb and sees the grave clothes over here, and the folded head clothes over there.

We who know the story are sharing their bewilderment. What has happened, what has gone on?

John; made bold by Peter, joins him in the tomb and tells us that he saw and believed. Then adds these words (v9) "*they still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead*".

Slide - quote

John is telling us that he believed BEFORE his full understanding clicked into place. The empty tomb and folded grave clothes allow him to make a leap of faith BEFORE intellectually understanding.

here is the same idea in an Indiana Jones film

Slide – Film Clip

(NB – here I showed the clip of Film where Indiana has to step out over a gaping chasm only to discover a rock bridge it was impossible to see. It was his 'leap of faith')

Slide – rock bridge

Reflecting back over his life as he writes his Gospel, John realises that this was the moment when belief really began. John wants us to believe. The picture he gives us is an empty tomb. This is what allowed him to step out in faith – depicted so memorably in that film clip.

But he still doesn't fully understand even though he believes and as for Peter I think he is still lost in utter misery. John continues the story...the two of them go away to their homes but Mary stays at the tomb. Mary has nowhere else to go, she remains in the place of desolation.

Slide – Mary and Angels

Different people deal differently with bereavement. I've known people who visit the body of a loved one many times before the funeral and visit the grave daily

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afterwards. I not implying any criticism, it's their way of coping. I don't think Mary can bear to be anywhere else, but her grief is made so much worse in that Jesus is missing. But the light is growing, dawn is coming.

There are dark times that all of us will go through when what we believe will be severely tested and we feel nothing other than our misery; but we are not alone, Jesus promises that he will be with us. Our temptation is to get through it as rapidly as we can, but there are lessons to be learnt in the darkness that we might otherwise never grasp.

Mary has nowhere else to go and no hope and can think only of finding His body when she encounters two angels; I think she's pretty oblivious as to who they are.

They ask her why she's crying because they are already in the resurrection, Mary is still in the crucifixion. She wants to find his body.

She encounters another person, instinct and logic tell her it must be a gardener. Where is Jesus? I'll go and get him?

Then everything changes in one simple word. Mary.

Slide – Mary greets Jesus

He says her name. Her belief came because she met Jesus, her life was transformed because he spoke her name.

Whether your starting point was intellectual, or a dawning understanding like John in the empty tomb, or an experience of the emotions, or a personal encounter with Jesus...John wants us to believe.

Here is one person's faith story.

(NB – here Katherine Hutchinson shared her testimony of coming to faith in a church that didn't preach about Jesus a great deal, or sin, or salvation particularly...but they were a very genuine loving church. Her encounter with God was through the love of a church family...that's what began her faith journey.

Later the gaps in her understanding were filled in and knowledge and experience grew – but she would say she felt God's presence and accepted God love before she understood intellectually.)

- Mary heard Jesus speaking her name.
- John saw the empty tomb and believed.
- Before long the disciples would encounter Jesus in a locked room.
- Katherine experienced the love of God from a church community.

When we encounter Jesus in a real way that includes our senses and our intellect, faith becomes as real and as firm as the rock bridge in the film clip.

John wants us to experience Jesus – those who cannot meet him as he did, or lean against him as he did.

In what way would you like to encounter Christ this Easter? Is it to have greater understanding? Or is it to hear him speak your name? Is there an area of desolation in your life and you would love Jesus to intervene. John knew that it was possible to encounter Jesus long after the ascension – and I know that to be true too. Don't let this be "just another Easter" let it be one that brings you Life – life to the full.