

Jesus is risen

Bernard Fidder, 11 April 2020

Reading: Matthew 28:1-10

Jesus is risen – he is risen indeed!

Celebrating Easter during isolation is different! No getting together, and worshipping together in one place. No opportunities to meet with family and friends – everything has to happen in our own households.

Adriana and I recognised that we do not have much to say to each other any more. We're both not very talkative, and if you experience together quite a little then there is not much to talk about.

Matthew's story can also be read as a isolation story, at least starting with isolation, but then the resurrection breaks through, and the resurrected Jesus is starting to bring people together around him.

The isolation starts at dawn of the first day of the week. This would have been the day after the Sabbath – what for Jewish society would be similar to a Monday feeling. We see the women (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary), isolated in their grief. In Matthew they only want to look at the grave – they're not intending to embalm the body.

At the grave site there were guards – ensuring that no one could get to the body or steal it. The authorities wanted to ensure that the Jesus' disciples could not steal the body and to claim that he was resurrected. This seems to have been furtherst of the mind of the disciples – it is the chief priest who later bribe the guards to ensure that they tell that the body was stolen – even while they were there to guard them.

So Jesus body was in isolation. Guards put around, the women have to look again from a distance.

But the first sign that the isolation has already been broken is the an earthquake and the dramatic entrance of the angel – rolling away the stone and then sitting on it. He seems to want to indicate that the stone does not have power over the resurrected body – the stone is reduced to a place to sit on. The guards are afraid of the angels appearance and actions – and they seem to shut down in shock. While Jesus has overcome death the guards are like death.

However the women do not seem to be as afraid – as the angel gives them the good news: Jesus, the one who is crucified, is risen. Have a look at the grave to see that he is not there any more and go tell the disciples. Jesus' resurrection has also taken place in isolation – there are no witnesses of that. But the women witness the outcome: the grave is empty.

They then hurry to the disciples: afraid yet filled with joy. They were in shock themselves and unsure what to feel. They were joyful, because the Master is not dead, but they were also afraid. Possibly, because they could not comprehend what the resurrection means... But knowing that nothing will be the same. This is the place of the greatest fear – if everything that we know, understand and believe is challenged to the core. That things that you were sure about – suddenly have been taken away but that no time has passed to understanding the implications and the new reality.

And then Jesus appears to them – giving certainty to at least one of their doubts: Jesus is truly alive. And they can only respond by worshipping him. Our only response to the living Jesus is worship. And they way that they worshipped him was to bow down in front on him and grasping his feet. When we worship God, we can only bow down. Like John the Baptist said that he was not worthy to tie Jesus' sandals, the women cannot approach Jesus face to face, and can only approach him at his feet. What can we learn ourselves what it truly means to worship Jesus.

Jesus then instructs the women to tell the Disciples to go to Gallilee, where later on we see Jesus meet with them and give them the great commission.

But to the women he says: Do not be afraid. They were afraid, yet filled with joy. Now that they have seen Jesus, they do not need to be afraid either. Only joy and worship remains.

How do we approach the risen Jesus? With fear? With doubt? With joy? Or with Worship? Maybe you have a mixture of all these feelings. We may have learned to approach the risen Jesus in a certain way, we know that we have to be joyful and worshipful.

But if we truly come to Jesus – the Son of God, then surely it is also OK to feel afraid. Here is God in human form. The one who loved mankind so much, that he died for us on the cross. Here is the God in human form who was raised from the dead. Who comes to us in love.

Surely if we truly see him our lives cannot be the same any more. And surely we can feel afraid – afraid of what might be, afraid of what may happen to us. As nothing can be the same any more.

As the disciples experienced – their lives were changed beyond recognition. Are we allowing the risen Jesus to have the same effect on our lives – even now that we have accepted him for already so long, and we have absorbed being a Christian in our live style and personal culture. Or have we accommodated him in our lives, made a space, without too much sacrifice?

Jesus also comes to us – do not be afraid. But he also says: come and follow me. What does that mean for us personally? What does that mean for us as a church? Are we afraid and tried to hide him in our lives?

Don't be afraid, he says – I am the risen Son of God, I am the Messiah – see I will make everything new.

And what can we do but just bow down and worship him. **Amen.**