

Easter 3, St Paul's Cathedral

Luke 24:36b – 48

May I speak in the name of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

It is somewhat daunting preaching today. I don't know you and you don't know me, and you might start looking at your watches after twenty five minutes or so! I hope you will forgive me a short sermon this Sunday.

It is not straightforward I am afraid. I stand here somewhat perplexed and indeed a little afraid. This has not gone to plan and there have been moments when I have been overcome with terror. Those who know me well will have seen that I have, at times, been sad, I am sorry to say.

I found myself, startled, astounded and even amazed by what I have seen. I am left disbelieving, I am sorry to say again.

Those are rather emotive words to open up my first sermon here at St Paul's. Being British, I am not known for visible shows of emotion; a firm handshake is about as far as I normally go. So do those words surprise or disappoint you? Or have you worked out the context?

These emotive words, *afraid*, *perplexed*, *sad*, *terrified* and *disbelieving*, are all words that I borrow from chapter 24 of Luke's Gospel. We heard those words both on Thursday Night at the Installation and this morning with our Gospel reading.

So these words actually describe the Resurrection rather more accurately than my current mental state.

And that should be the thing that really surprises us. Luke, chapter 24, starts off with the account of the Resurrection and the approach to the tomb by the women. What they witness *perplexes* them and then *terrifies* them. At best they can only stand there with eyes cast down.

A little further on in Luke 24, but still on Easter Day within the chronology of the Gospel, we have the account of the disciples leaving Jerusalem and heading towards Emmaus. They are described as being full of *sadness*. They recount what the women have told them and are left *astounded* by this. Yet further on in Luke's Gospel, but still within that first Easter Day, we hear of the same disciples heading back to Jerusalem to meet with the other disciples. Jesus then appears to them and they are *startled* and *terrified*.

There are no other words describing the disciples' emotions in this whole section, other than the disciples on the road to Emmaus saying that their hearts were burning within them. Then, towards the end of the reading we heard this morning, we have the profound word *joy*, but even that is equivocated in the phrase "whilst in their joy they were disbelieving".

Those who think the resurrection was greeted by unadulterated joy, neither know their bibles nor have delved their own experience, in my opinion. It was not all Easter bunnies and chocolate eggs. The Resurrection and indeed the whole world of faith that springs from it, is rather more subtle and complex than many of us (especially professionally religious) tend to make it.

We celebrate the resurrection not simply because we believe it happened, but because of what it continues to do. We see the Resurrection when it takes the nervous, the afraid, the frightened, the perplexed, the anxious, the excluded (as women often were), the terrified, and through the gift of grace renews them and gives courage and humility, strength, confidence and joy.

This is a God worth worshipping.

There is another rather startling aspect in the Gospel account we just heard. It is the realisation that joy goes hand-in-hand with disbelief.

Cognitive assent to the Resurrection comes *after* our hearts are burning, or even perhaps after joy. I don't know about you, but cognitive belief is something that, at times, is hard. I often find that I am both a better man and a person more ready to believe after my morning cup of coffee. I am rather glad that faith does not hang totally on cognitive assent to a number of dogmas or theological propositions. Worship, and specifically joyful worship, can beget belief, as much as hard thinking.

So here in this short reading, where we hear of the disciples meeting the resurrected Christ, we can glimpse something of the subtle complexity of faith and the space it provides for both a heartfelt response and a head-centred response. Through all this, after the fear is faced and the anxiety named and even the sadness is comprehended, there might be glimpsed joy. Not a bad word to end this sermon on. Joy.

Alleluia Christ is Risen. Amen