

Easter Sunday

Sermon

"Run. Turn. See. Tell."

John 20:1-16

Hands up if you remember playing Hopscotch
Throw the stone one square, get it, hop back, then throw it another
step, hop out, pick it up, hop back, then another square, then another.

John's story of Easter Sunday morning reminds me of that.

First we have Mary, walking to the tomb. She sees the stone is open,
and then she rushes straight back home.

Then we have Peter, and the other disciple. They run out to the tomb,
one peeks in side, then comes back out again, Peter goes right in, but
then quick as a wink they take off back home again.

Then Mary goes back, goes inside, where she encounters the angels,
then back out again where finally she comes face to face with Jesus,
then she goes back home.

Each one overcoming their fears just a little more, taking one step
further than the one before. The story is framed within all these trips,
from town to tomb and back again.

And I love John's use of the word 'run'. Do you know it's the only time
in the gospels when anyone runs! Matthew and Luke also emphasise
that those first early witnesses RAN; Matthew makes it even more
explicit, describing how the 2 Marys "left the tomb quickly with fear and
great joy and ran to tell the disciples" (28:8)

Easter Sunday is a time of urgency, it quickens the pulse rate, it shocks
us into action. Jesus is gone, Jesus is raised, Jesus has exploded from
the tomb. News of great fear, great wonder, great joy, all mixed
together.

So that's one of the action words in our Bible reading together. Running.
Can anyone remember what other verbs are used in this astonishing
story? In case you haven't guessed yet, this is my theme for sermon this
morning; you have to find a 'way in' to the Bible, and this morning we
are using VERBs as our way in, and being curious about what the Holy
Spirit will open up to us this resurrection morning.

So, what other verbs are there?

Weep.

Stood

Went/came/ return

Enter

I want to pick up 3 key action words: turn, see, and tell.

Let's start with **'turn'**.

It is a great cry of the Psalms: "Turn to me" .. . 40:1

Throughout the Bible God calls his people to turn towards him, but so often, again and again, they turn away. The prophets are over and over repeating this. And they describe how God would like to turn away from his people and forget them but he just cannot, and instead God keeps on turning towards us, keeps on inviting us to turn towards him, so that we stand face to face, heart to heart in love.

Relationships are always like this, aren't they. Come on, you know what I mean. Marriages, friendships, consist of this dance of turning towards the other person, sometimes just in time to feel them turn away from you.

Hands up if you remember Rock and Roll dancing? This is very much about turning towards, turning away, and if you get the cues wrong you end up crashing into each other or spinning away and losing your grip on each other.

Mary turns towards Jesus, then away from him in anger, not recognising him. But Jesus turns towards her, reaches out for her, calling her by name. His longing is for her to see him, to know him, not as a man but as God, the eternal God of love who longs for you, desires that you would turn again to him.

'See'. This verb is used 8 times in this story. Sometimes you just have to count these things. Let's remember together who saw what:

- 1) Mary saw the tomb open
- 2) The other disciple saw the linen cloths
- 3) Peter saw the cloths, picking out the way they lay and the special head cloth
- 4) "he saw and believed" ...

This is a classic Gospel line. The Gospel writers are always over and over again connecting the EVENTS they narrate to the MEANING of the Gospel story. So that the experiences that those handful of people had 2,000 years ago are not past history but present reality for believers in every time and place.

When John says that the disciple "saw and believed", those words leap out across the millennia directly into our hearts, because at that point this story is about me. And you. Just as much as it is about that unnamed disciple on that rocky hillside as the sky was lightening that day so long ago.

Whenever we see a sign of the risen Christ alive in our midst, then we believe. We believe a little more, we trust a little more. With that disciple, we too catch glimpses of the rags of death cast aside, even though death and fear still hem us in on every side. We cannot see with our eyes the tangible body of Jesus, but we can and do see with spiritual eyes the marks of his presence. See and believe, friends, that Jesus is alive, Christ is risen. Let this truth expand in your soul, until more and more it pushes out fear and doubt, until it illuminates your mind and heart with love.

When Mary enters the tomb she sees the angels – which would be quite enough to blow one's mind in one morning you'd think. But then on her way out she sees a man but she does not SEE him, until he speaks her name. Absolutely one of my all time favourite Bible moments.

Then, the climax and summary of the whole story is her declaration to the friends of Jesus, "I have seen the Lord". And I think that is the moment when the church was born. We talk about Pentecost as the church's birthday, and that's true too, but I love to think that when Mary stood up and said "I have seen the Lord", at that moment the gates of hell, cracked open by Christ, crumbled to the ground and the church came into being.

Time to wrap up. I want to finish with the verb 'said', which is used over and over in the gospels, a tool for the narration, but it has particular significance in this story. Mary runs and tells Peter the first time. Then Peter and the other disciple go home – but hang on a minute, do they tell anyone? No. They go "to their homes", they hide, there is only silence in that moment.

But Jesus is quite strong on this point with Mary. Her instructions from the Lord are to go to the disciples and SAY, and he gives her specific words, a message to share. So back she goes and tells them, but John adds in that extra depth of meaning here that I was talking about earlier. She doesn't just 'say' her news to the disciples, she "announces" it, she 'tells' her story. With this John again invites us into the story, invites us to take up the story, to join with Mary in telling others. Just as she shared what she had seen and heard, so we too are charged by Jesus with sharing our faith.

We normally think that the important words in the Bible are the big theological words, big ideas that we can argue about to wring out the truth about God. But the little ordinary words are actually just as important, words that you might skip straight over, words like 'said' and 'went' and 'turn' ... these are carefully chosen by the Biblical writers because it can be in the 'doing' words that we find a frame for our own doing, the movements of our heart, the choices we make every day.

Jesus is alive. Halleluia.

Jesus is alive not just 2,000 years ago, but here and now.

Jesus came alive for Mary, Peter and the disciples way back then, but he can be just as life-changing for us.

He runs towards us, and invites us to run to him

He turns towards us, and invites us to turn to him.

He longs for us to know him, and keeps giving us glimpses of his love in action, so that we may SEE AND BELIEVE

And finally, we calls us to tell of his love to others.