

A Life or Death Matter!

Acts 10³⁴⁻⁴³; Psalm 118; 1 Corinthians 15¹⁻¹¹; John 20¹⁻¹⁸

We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (Ac 10³⁹⁻⁴¹)

Last Sunday, in Egypt, whilst Coptic Orthodox Christians were celebrating Palm Sunday, ISIS suicide bombers attacked two Churches leaving 44 dead. We grieve at the loss and rejoice with our fellow Christians that, for those who have died in faith, they are celebrating their first Easter in the immediate presence of the Risen Christ!

Some people do live their faith as a life or death experience!

We all should!

The death Jesus was real. The disciples and those close to him had settled themselves to mourn his death and to attempt to rebuild their lives. Whilst they had heard Jesus predict the resurrection, it probably hadn't sunk in and they had no experience of what the resurrection might be like - that is why Acts is so keen to make the point that the disciples were **witnesses** both to Jesus death and his resurrection and John takes the time to record the personal reactions to the empty tomb:

- ✦ Mary Magdalene was confused and afraid by the empty tomb. Not only had she lost the life of the one she loved, but now his body had gone too. She went to find the people she could trust to help her; those who shared her experience of grief.
- ✦ Peter and John ran to the tomb and, characteristically, John looks in while Peter rushes in. They had no idea what had happened or what would happen - which is why the Bible tells us **the disciples returned to their homes**.
- ✦ Mary Magdalene remains distressed and in her desperation asks a stranger - **supposing him to be the gardener** - until the realisation dawns that this is Jesus! Jesus! Risen from the dead!
- ✦ No one would have been prepared for the return of Mary Magdalene - a group ready to continue consoling each other hears the **announcement** from Mary: **I have seen the Lord!** And the day goes on - Jesus appearing

to the disciples; Jesus walking with two on the road and being recognised only as he broke the bread.

What God did in Jesus he begins in us all until we know the full truth of the resurrection when this life is ended!

- ✦ For Peter this was a moment of resurrection - he had betrayed Jesus and Jesus had died and with that death his hope: with the resurrection of Jesus (and his subsequent reinstatement) his life could begin again too! That is the story of the resurrection for us too: we can begin again!
- ✦ For Mary it was both the moment of intimate recognition of the one she loved and the moment to tell the Good News.

Now a challenge for you. Paul & Sylvia Rogoff, through their association with the Gideons, have made available beautifully bound copies of the New Testament & Psalms. I will put one in your hand as you leave Church. The challenge is to do as Mary Magdalene did and announce Jesus, dead and raised from the dead. If you don't have a Bible, keep this copy for yourself: it is a gift. If you have a Bible, then give it away: give it as a gift - and give it away with the prayer that the recipient will know Jesus for themselves.

As people of faith we are about the issues of death and life:

- ✦ At the centre of our faith is the confidence that the resurrection isn't just a fact in history, but a daily experience of the living Christ.
- ✦ And it is something we cannot be silent about - telling it is the message of life itself!

**Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**