

Easter Day – St Paul’s Manuka – 16 April, 2017.**Preacher: The Venerable Dr Brian Douglas****Acts 10: 34-43****Hymn to the Risen Christ****Colossians 3: 1-4****Matthew 28: 1-10**

We all have our little obsessions. Mine is being a fanatic about the apostrophe. It drives my wife mad. As we are walking or driving around I see the improper use or non use of the apostrophe on a sign and go on about it. You know the sort of sign you see advertising tomatoes but with it spelled ‘tomatoe’s’. It make me mad. You can imagine my interest when I saw a TV program recently where a man in England has a similar obsession about the apostrophe. Admittedly he takes it a little further than I do. He does not just annoy his wife about the improper or non use of the apostrophe, but instead goes out and makes corrections on signs. Where there is an unneeded apostrophe he covers it up and where an apostrophe should be he adds it in. He even has a special tool he calls ‘the apostrophiser’, a long wooden implement, which he uses to place little bits of plastic over unneeded apostrophes and to add small apostrophes where they are needed. When my wife heard about this she said: ‘Does he have a club? You could join it!’

I guess this man with his apostrophiser is trying to put things right. He sees a problem and takes action.

Easter is like that. Easter puts things right again. At Easter time God overcomes the power of death and sin and puts things right again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It was much more than an apostrophe though – it was the whole story. God took action at Easter time and Jesus rose from the dead. He was alive and the relationship between people and God was put right again. Death was conquered and God gave us the hope of new life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Each year at Easter time we know this power again and Christ lives in us to grow and to change us so we may live more closely and well with God and with one another.

When I read this gospel passage though I get the feeling though that there were some very scared people wandering around on the first Easter Day. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to tomb. Now for Jewish people to go near a tomb was pretty scary in itself but add to that a great

earthquake, an angel descending from heaven and the stone of the tomb rolled away with the angel sitting on it with an appearance like lightning and you have one truly scary scene for those who gathered at the tomb.

Then we hear about the guards. Now these guys were not push overs and probably they had seen some pretty terrifying stuff and done some awful things in their lives but now they were shaking in fear and all the colour had drained from their faces. They were described as being like dead men.

So we have two terrified women and a couple of tough guys shaking with fear and in the midst of all this the angel says: 'Do not be afraid'. This is the ultimate understatement.

I guess that these two ladies were full of terror, doubt, fear, confusion and much much more but we are also told that they were full of joy. There was such a mix of emotion going on. How very real is this scene. Don't worry about angels and all that but just think for a moment of our own lives and how they can sometimes be full of both fear and joy at the same time. Our emotions can be mixed and confusing and yet in the middle of this human situation we, like these two women, can do the most amazing of things.

There is such wonderful humanity in all of this mixed as it is with the divine reality of a risen Lord standing before them. Words were not important for the two women – they just wanted to touch him, come close to him, hug him and fall at his feet and worship him. It was his presence, perhaps even more than his words telling them not to be afraid that would have reassured them.

Surely Jesus knew all this. Surely Jesus could see their fear as well as their joy and he wanted them to be close to him. But at the same time he has a clear message for them. He wants them to go and see the others and to get on with the job of being his disciples. He has put things right and risen from the dead and he wants them to tell people about it in the power he was giving them.

On this Easter Day Jesus meets us risen from the tomb – that is, if we are prepared to meet him. The whole of Easter makes sense in this Eucharist we share together. It is here in worship that Jesus greets us and invites us in and then feeds us with his own body and blood. It is here in the Eucharist that Jesus invites us to be with each other in ways that accept difference and ambiguity. It is here in the Eucharist that we experience

and celebrate the power of new life and the victory over death. In the face of fear and terror we see hope and joy on the faces of these two women. In the face of our rich mixture of joy and pain we too can see Jesus this day and it is in this hope and joy we share as we reach out our hands to be touched by Jesus and fed by him.

Jesus Christ is risen today – it's much more than an apostrophe – it's the whole story. It is nothing less than God acting in our world to put things right in the midst of abuse, even in the church, in the midst of all the uncertainty and pain and war and terror in our world. Despite the real problems the Easter message is hopeful. The Easter message is peace. The Easter message is light and life. So let us celebrate the feast and live in his power, his hope and his mission, sent like those two women long ago to tell people this good news and to live it so that God's action of putting things right is known in the world.