

Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10

The Gospel reading for today tells of a violent earthquake which came suddenly.

I'm quite sure that the feeling of everything moving underneath our feet would be quite terrifying.

How frightening to feel that there is nothing firm, nothing secure beneath us.

Maybe that's how many of us are feeling at the moment.

The things that we have trusted as firm and secure have suddenly become very insecure.

Our jobs, our homes, our relationships, our health.

Maybe the thought of losing any of those things shakes us.

But each one of us will have either faced this already or will one day face it.

The things we had previously put our faith in, or relied upon, snatched like a rug from under our feet, and in those times we grasp at anything that promises even a glimpse of security.

On that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary faced a situation in which their world has been changed forever.

The man, who promised so much, had been killed and laid to rest in a tomb.

This man had performed miracles, he had stood up to teach those in authority how to live according to God's Word, and he had even raised people from the dead.

Where is their hope now?

As they try to cope with the emotional earthquakes of the past few days, they go to the tomb together.

On their way, they experience a physical earthquake.

The guards at the tomb also felt the earth shake.

And they see an angel of the Lord in shining white who rolled back the stone in front of the tomb.

Most appropriately, they did the only logical thing when faced with such strange sights – they shook like an earthquake themselves and fell over as if they were dead.

There are several times in Matthew's gospel where he points out a violent shaking of the earth.

For example, when Jesus died, the earth shook and rocks split.

The guards around Jesus saw the shaking and bore witness that Jesus is the Son of God.

When Jesus rose from dead, the earth shook once more and the guards witnessed it again.

What is Matthew is trying to tell us?

Is he reminding us of the other times when the earth shook?

As we look back into the Bible, we remember that when the Israelites were around Mt Sinai, the earth shook.

Perhaps Matthew is pointing to the fact that when the earth shook at these times, God was present on earth.

These were times when God acted.

Yet earthquakes bring fear.

Where is our security when everything has changed, moved and been taken away from us?

As the two Mary's walked toward the tomb and felt the earthquake, they were terrified.

Their whole world had been turned upside down.

And at the time when they thought God was absent and defeated, the angel said those wonderful words; 'Do not be afraid.'

Later, when they hurried from the tomb with mixed feelings of fear and joy, how did Jesus himself greet them?

‘Do not be afraid.’

Why shouldn’t they be afraid?

Why shouldn’t we be afraid?

Life can be frightening but in the midst of turmoil and upheaval, Christians believe that God is at work.

Every year at Easter we hear these words.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

Death has been defeated.

But what has that got to do with our struggles at work, our struggles at home, our fears of the current risk to health and wellbeing, our fear of not seeing friends and family?

I suggest the answer is - Everything!!

It's when the physical, the emotional and the mental earthquakes surround us and we feel like we are on shaky ground, the words the angel and Jesus spoke to the women are the most welcome and reassuring words we can hear:

Do not be afraid.

Why?

Because through the death of our Lord and Saviour we have hope.

A sure and certain hope.

Jesus died so that we may be forgiven and have a new life in him.

The hope of eternal life.

Because Christ lives, we can also live.

And this is the hope and faith that helps us face our daily earthquakes.

Those things which shake us.

Sometimes just a little and sometimes more profoundly.

We discover that it is at the times when we think we only have shaky ground on which to stand,

we instead realise that we have the most firm foundation in our Lord and Saviour.

Words like 'do not be afraid' and 'your sins are forgiven' are so precious.

The assurance of peace, comfort, and forgiveness is offered.

And this changes everything.

Our hope rests in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those wonderful words 'He is risen'.

He is the light and the darkness shall not overcome it.

There is hope after hopelessness.

We celebrate his glorious resurrection and we receive that joy and hope in Christ.

Alleluia Christ is Risen

He is Risen indeed, Alleluia

Amen