

End the Week with CME - March 14, 2008

14th Mar 2008

Welcome to End the Week with CME! This weekly email is sent automatically to Clergy and Readers in the diocese (if you don't want to receive it, please send an email to CovEW-unsubscribe@lists.covlec.org) but anyone is welcome to subscribe to the list, and we are especially keen to pass it on to any interested lay people, especially those who may have responsibility for preaching. To subscribe they simply need to email CovEW-subscribe@lists.covlec.org.

End the Week will now 'break up' for Easter, and will be back on Friday 4 April.

Coming Up

Unveiling the Women in the Bible

Dr Maria Frahm-Arp (PhD Warwick) will be presenting a day seminar, in which she:

- uncovers the stories of the women in the Bible,
- examines the social and religious roles they played,
- explores what relevance this has for our lives today.

Saturday 12 April 2008, at the Chaplaincy (Warwick University campus), 9.30am - 4pm. Cost: £5.00 (students £2.50). Please bring your own lunch. Hot drinks will be provided.

To book email mariafrahmarp@hotmail.com, or contact Emma Bratton on 07977 593017 or at emmajanebratton@googlemail.com.

Looking at Matthew

This is the year of Matthew, and after Pentecost we have a straight run though his gospel until the Sundays before Advent. This study day will look at the structure of the gospel and some of Matthew's overall themes,

together with an opportunity to examine one or two passages in greater depth.

Tuesday 22 April 2008, at Offa House, 10am-3pm with an abbreviated repeat from 7.30-9.30pm. Led by Richard Cooke. Cost: £30 (including lunch) for the daytime course, £12.50 (including coffee and cakes) for the evening. Grants of half the cost are available for clergy and Readers. Book through sarah.palmer@covcofe.org.

BBC's *The Passion*

Episode 1: Sunday 16 March, 8pm-9pm, BBC1
Episode 2: Monday 17 March, 8.30pm-9pm, BBC1
Episode 3: Friday 21 March 9pm-9.30pm, BBC1
Episode 4: Sunday 23 March, TBA, BBC1

More details at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/programmes/thepassion/episodes/>

Notes on the Gospel Readings for Easter & Easter 2 (Sunday March 23 & Sunday March 30, 2008)

John 20. 1-18; John 20.19-end

Why are you weeping?

The angels ask Mary 'Why are you weeping?' as she stands by the tomb (v.13) and so does Jesus (v.15). But how do they ask? Is it a 'pull yourself together and dry your eyes' kind of question? Or an 'it's all right - Jesus is risen' kind of statement? John, who loves to play with the symbolism of light and understanding, shows us an extra level of meaning in the darkness before dawn during which this encounter takes place (v.1). For as the sun rises, so Mary begins dimly to see, through her veil of tears, that the Son is already risen. But do her tears magically dry?

I guess it depends how you think she was crying. A good friend of ours who suddenly lost her husband utterly unexpectedly before Christmas spoke to me the other day of how she has wept recently in deep, racking sobs that come from such a depth that it is scary. I remember the same thing myself at a moment of deep loss. For when we grieve for the loss of a partner we mourn not only their loss but the loss of our own future dreams too. Was Mary's loss similar? Mary's relationship with Jesus was exceptionally close, as John shows us by making her the key figure in this first resurrection appearance (but, despite *The Da Vinci Code*, no-one seriously thinks they were married!). As she weeps in the garden, it seems to me that she weeps for herself too. For Jesus' dead body could be of no use to him any more, but it was all she had left, literally all she could

hold on to. And now she finds it is not there (v.2) and her grief catches up with her.

Having and holding a body is a profound comfort when you're bereaved. I remember a few years ago meeting some women from Chile, now quite elderly, whose sons had been amongst the 'disappeared' in the Pinochet regime. One of them, the tears still in her eyes, said 'Mary the mother of Jesus at least had her son's body to hold. But I never held my son, and I don't know where he is buried. I cannot even put flowers on his grave.' Thirty years on her grief was still fresh. For Mary Magdalene too there was the profoundest of losses, and the cry is wrung out of her: 'I don't know where they have put him' (vv.2, 15).

And then the gardener dissolves into Jesus. She sees who it is who stands before her (v.16) and reaches out. But she can't hold him now either (v.17). He is restored to her but she must let him go and forge a new future without his physical presence.

For John is at pains to emphasise to us in his retelling of the resurrection story that Jesus will not stay this time either. Instead it is by his Spirit that Jesus will remain with his disciples, as next week's reading will show.

So how does Mary run through the grey streets as the dawn breaks, to tell the disciples? I suspect the tears are still fresh on her cheeks as she bursts in upon them. For joy takes time to grow and even in her realisation of the reality of the resurrection Mary perhaps sees that it will not be the same again. The future may be better and brighter, but still something of her old easy familiarity with Jesus will be lost. Her grief is not misplaced, and it's right that she should weep as she realises that the door to the past has now gently closed. Perhaps she fears the future a little too and her sight is dazzled again as the sun shines through her tears.

Mary's tears remind us that resurrection is not simply the happy ending to a story. It is an awesome and frightening moment when the natural processes of the world are turned on their heads as God remakes the creation. No wonder Matthew speaks of earthquakes and Mark of fear and silence. Here, before the empty tomb, it may be good to pause with Mary and her tears, lest we should hold the wonder of resurrection too cheap.

The man who managed to miss the resurrection

My friend and colleague David Runcorn writes in his excellent book *Rumours of Life* 'Where was Thomas on the night that Jesus appeared to the disciples? Had he popped out to collect a take-away meal? Doors locked after him. Can we imagine him returning with the food ("Five plaice and chips, seven cod and chips, two pasty and chips, three pancake rolls and a large bottle of Diet Coke") to find everyone so overwhelmed and excited that no one is interested in eating? Thomas is remembered for his doubts, but he might equally be remembered for his unfortunate lack of timing. This is the man who managed to miss the resurrection!' (*Rumours of Life* SPCK 2/2006, pp.94-95).

The trouble with Thomas is that he doesn't trust other people. Doubt, the word we associate with him, is not there in the Greek of this passage: Jesus actually says 'do not be without faith (apistis), but have faith (pistis)'

(v.27). Lacking faith in the word of the others is what makes Thomas miss the resurrection in its wider sense. He could have participated in the joy of the other disciples but instead stubbornly refuses to take their word for it (v.25). Only an actual confrontation with Jesus will make him believe in the end.

Thomas is a bit of a patron saint for the modern world. Scientific method is founded on a Thomas-like scepticism, which says 'I'll believe it when I see it'. You imagine he'd be the only disciple Richard Dawkins might fancy a pint of beer with. And yet as science developed in the twentieth century and opened up a chaotic world of quantum richness, so faith has become paramount again. The exciting subatomic world which I don't pretend to understand of quarks and such-like, where light can be described as both wave and particle, where Schrödinger's cat can be alive and dead simultaneously and universes may apparently multiply with gay abandon we accept by faith. Would Thomas?

Faith in the risen Jesus does not always come by direct encounter. Sometimes the journey begins with trusting others and suspending our disbelief. Resurrection is, to us, often problematic. How many dead people have you seen rise, and even if they did would they be the same as Jesus, able to walk through locked doors, recognisably the same yet also somehow a being of a different dimension, as Paul (almost) puts it (1 Cor. 15.35-50)?

It was perhaps Thomas's literalness that meant that he managed to miss the resurrection rather than a late night trip to the chip-shop. I have spent many years studying the resurrection accounts and I can still find no more elegant explanation for the growth of the church and for the continued phenomenon of Jesus-worship, than the one which the disciples gave to Thomas: 'We have seen the Lord' (v.25). Jesus adds a new beatitude to the list: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed' (v.29). After all John wrote his book for them - that is to say, for us (v.31).

And Finally...

Traditionally Easter sermons began with a joke - no, really. So here's one (apologies for the Americanisms).

What is Easter?

Three children are asked by the local pastor to answer one simple question. The pastor asks the first, "What is Easter?" The child replies, "Oh, that's easy! It's the holiday in November when everyone gets together, eats turkey, and are thankful..." "Wrong!," replies the pastor and proceeds to ask the second one the same question, "What is Easter?"

The second child replies, "Easter is the holiday in December when we put up a nice tree, exchange presents, and celebrate the birth of Jesus." The pastor shakes his head and then asks the third child "What is Easter?"

The third child smiles confidently and looks the pastor in the eye, "I know what Easter is." "Oh?" says the

pastor incredulously.

"Easter is the Christian holiday that coincides with the Jewish celebration of Passover. Jesus and his disciples were eating at the last supper and Jesus was later deceived and turned over to the Romans by one of his disciples. The Romans took him to be crucified and he was stabbed in the side, made to wear a crown of thorns, and was hung on a cross with nails through his hands. He was buried in a nearby cave which was sealed off by a large boulder."

The pastor smiles broadly with delight. The child continues, "Every year the boulder is moved aside so that Jesus can come out... and, if he sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter."

That's all folks!

Richard

Richard Cooke

Coventry CME

Richard.Cooke@CovCofE.org