

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

Reflection – Easter Vigil and Service of Light – 16th April 2022

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Burial in Jesus' time was a two stage event. Caves would be carved out of the rock, big enough for two people to walk in, and ledges carved into the walls. Bodies would be carefully wrapped with perfumed spices and left on the ledge, the bones to be collected when nature had done its work, and put into a special box. Other bodies would also be placed on the ledges as time went on – hence the perfumed spices to make it possible to enter. So each cave could contain several bodies. But the one into which the body of Jesus was placed was brand new. He was the only occupant. The cave belonged to one of the members of the high council who could vouch for that and he was one of the men who put the body of Christ into it with all due reverence. There could be no mistake, there was no chance of mixing up other bodies which may not have been dead for this final astonishing miracle. Made all the more astonishing as it was the women who were first to witness and be comforted – the women who in that time were of no account, but who had bravely stayed with Jesus throughout his final horrific journey.

I was wondering how those women, who were the first to see the empty tomb and the two angels, and to know that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, must have felt. The I came across this meditation from Nick Fawcett's book "No ordinary man" and I think he puts it rather well. He writes from Mary Magdalene's point of view:

"I'll never be able to say what it meant to me, after the horror and heartache, the darkness and despair, to hear that wonderful, astonishing news – Jesus, alive! I'd lived in a daze until then, unable to take in the horror of what I'd seen, the anguish and the agony which he'd borne with such quiet dignity and awesome courage. He'd warned us to expect the worst, and I suppose in our hearts we'd known what was coming but we'd refused to accept it, hoping against hope there might be some other way, a path less costly, less awful for us all.

But as we walked that morning to the tomb, all such thoughts were gone, buried along with our Lord, life dark, cold, empty, bereft of meaning. We were blind to everything in our grief, scarcely aware of... light flooding around us, but when we reached the stone, rolled away from the tomb, we saw that all right, and for a moment we just stood there gazing in confusion, not knowing where to turn or what to say.

That's when it came, the news that took our breath away: "He is not here, but has risen."

We scarcely dared look at first, afraid it might all be a dream, but finally we found the courage, and it was true, he was gone! – just the grave clothes left to show he'd been there.

You can imagine how we felt, our hearts pounding with excitement; but there was yet more to come, things yet more wonderful.....

He had risen, just as we'd been told, death unable to hold him!

Only it wasn't just Jesus who rose that day, it was all of us: for there in the garden life began again, life which we thought had died in us for ever – hope reborn, faith renewed, love rekindled, joy restored – and we knew now these could never be destroyed – the proof was there before us!"

In the prayer that follows this meditation, Nick Fawcett writes:

"Gracious God, through the resurrection of your Son you not only raised him to life; you brought also renewal and restoration to his broken disciples. From the depths of misery you brought jubilation; from the pit of despair you brought hope; from the trough of despair you brought faith. Life which had seemed without meaning suddenly pulsated with purpose again, the future rich with promise as never before. It is a miracle which has been re-enacted in countless lives across the centuries and which continues to be repeated today; for you are at work still in the world and in our own lives, reaching out wherever there is need, wherever people are broken, wherever hope has died, bringing afresh your gift of life. Gracious God, work within us now, refresh our hearts and revive our spirits, and make us a new creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Amen