

Easter Evensong 2014

Hello. My name is John.

Hello. My name is John. They've asked me here to talk about **that** day, that first day of the week, that first day of a new era.

It was quite a day. Looking back on it, it seems just like yesterday.

We were all still pretty exhausted and anxious that morning – well, terrified actually. We thought they might do to us what they did to him. Some of us had watched his brutal death at a distance days before; some of us had run off, some to Mary and Martha's outside the city to keep safe. Those Romans are barbaric; they'll stop at nothing.

I was sleeping, probably exhaustion, when the commotion happened. A couple of the women who had gone off to anoint his body burst in early in the morning – **too** early in the morning –and they said **the body had gone** from the tomb. And we'd better come quickly and see.

Usually it takes a lot to wake me up, but that day I was alert in an instant, and running fast after Peter to the garden tomb, secretly supplied by Joseph of Arimathea. I overtook him and got there first; Peter's not as fit as he was in his fishing days.

They were right, you know, the body was gone; but the grave clothes lay folded on the slab they'd left him on in the tomb. I saw that when I peeked in; and Peter confirmed it when he walked into the tomb himself. That gave me courage to walk in too.

My head was spinning. All I could think of was that what **he** had said must be true; that bit about him rising on the third day; that day was the third day after he died.

But what could *we* do? The body had gone. We trudged off home to get some food. Mary stayed, too upset to move.

A couple of hours later she burst in again in quite a state. Not again, I thought! She shouted that she'd **seen Jesus** and he wasn't the gardener, **and two angels** and they weren't gardeners either. We calmed her down and listened.

The body was gone. She'd tried to find it. She'd met two men, who turned out to be angels, not gardeners. Then she met Jesus, though she didn't recognise him at first. It was the way he said her name that made her realise it was him.

The risen Jesus told her to come and tell us; and that she did.

He sent us a message through her; that he was soon to ascend to his Father in heaven, just as he said he would. Again *I* immediately thought how true that must be; it was just as he said it would be when he was alive. Others were more sceptical; perhaps they should pay more attention to Jesus' exact words, as I do.

Something did strike me as odd about this message though. He'd called us 'disciples', 'servants' and 'friends' before, but never 'brothers'; *'Go and say to **my brothers**, I am going up to my father **and your father**, to my God **and your God**'. **Something has changed, something big.***

We knew his death would change things, but not how. **It's like his death united our humanity with his divinity.** It's like now we are **all** united in God's family; God is **our** father, as well as **his**, **we** are **his** brothers; one family of God; that's new, that's so intimate...

Well, anyway, we sent out messages to meet together that very night in the upper room in Jerusalem where we'd often met before. We wanted to discuss the missing body and Mary's encounter with Jesus and the angels.

When we got there, we locked the doors in case the Jews or the Romans were still looking for us.

Then **he** appeared to **us**, behind locked doors; one minute it was just us, the next **He** was there. There was no mistaking him.

We were gobsmacked, and frankly a bit scared. But he wished us Peace; and as he did so, **calm washed over us**; it **was** the Lord. He even showed us the marks of his crucifixion; there was no doubt, it was him.

Peace be with you. As the father sent me, so I am sending you; those were his exact words; *As the father sent me, so I am sending you*. I could feel my heart quicken. He'd appeared to us for a purpose, to send us out, not like he'd sent us out before two by two. This time it was much bigger; we were sent out, **as his father had sent him out**... but what could **that** mean?

Then, remarkably, he **breathed** on us; *receive the Holy Spirit*, he said; and then gave us authority to forgive sins! I hardly could believe what I was hearing: only God can forgive sins.

Remember all that trouble with the Pharisee's when Jesus went about forgiving people's sins; they went ape! But we ignored them when we could; people were changed, you could see it, their sins **were** forgiven. God was very much alive and active in Jesus.

Now he wants **us** to do the same, to forgive people's sins as Jesus did. I guess that's why he gave us God the Holy Spirit, to do that work of forgiveness *in* us and *through* us. God forgives sins *through* **us**; mindblowing! To forgive sin, not by our own power, but by his power within us...

Then he was gone; just as suddenly as he had arrived.

We blinked. We were speechless.

Mary had been right. Jesus **had** risen from the dead, just as he said he would. Now he sent us out, *just as his father sent him out*; we held the authority of God to forgive sin, on trust, through the Holy Spirit which he gave to us in that upper room.

It was like Jesus breathed **new life and new responsibility** into us; just like God breathed the Spirit of God onto his creation to give the world life. New life, that's what it must be, the Holy Spirit given to us; God's life within us; God's mission entrusted to us...

Then a knock at the door brought us to our senses. We jumped; it could be the Jews or the Romans. It was Thomas; late again.

Excitedly, we told him all that had happened. He had that sceptical look; Thomas likes dealing with first-hand facts. *Unless I see for myself, I can't believe*, he said. You've got to admire his wanting proof; I just **knew** it was true, it was scripture fulfilled. Still he got his proof the following week when Jesus appeared again to us all.

It was quite a day, that day; that first day of the Resurrection, that first day of the new era.

I remember how I felt that night as I went to bed; that warmth, that certainty growing within me; that knowledge that what he said **had** come true, and that feeling that more would come true in the days and months ahead; that glow of faith within me, just like it was in the old days when he was by our sides, teaching us before his death.

And then a thought struck me; if that incredible day of miracles was just **day one** of the resurrection, just imagine what tomorrow might bring.