

In a week full of problems, on this day their biggest problem was the stone. The women needed to properly tend to Jesus' body for burial, and a stone stood in the way. But their concern was diverted as they approached the tomb - the stone had already been rolled aside. And everything that happened next was just as curious. A young man in a white robe waits for them; 'Don't be alarmed...' (too late for that) 'You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth...he has been raised; he is not here.'

Good news? Not at all. Not for these women - not yet. Terror and amazement is the next order of business, and at this point the earliest versions of Mark's Gospel fall silent. Terror and amazement.

When we set out on our annual season of remembrance, we do it knowing that on Easter Sunday we can - among other things - throw off the uncertainty and grief that has been building throughout Lent, and is sharpened to a fine point in Holy Week. We celebrate the victory of the empty tomb. But on that first day of the week, it wasn't good news. Not yet.

Terror and amazement. These fall at the extreme limits of our emotional range. Terror and amazement are why people ride roller coasters or go bungee jumping. These are emotions that are sure signs of life - the heart races, adrenaline surges, breathing quickens - and the women who were Jesus most faithful companions race off into the morning with their questions unanswered and their grief momentarily suspended. And somehow this becomes good news.

Later editors added to the story. Disjointed stories about an appearance to Mary (from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons), then an encounter with two of them who were walking into the country. And both of these later additions seem to help us turn an empty tomb into good news. But the caveat with each of these stories, is that the witnesses were not believed.

What turns an empty tomb into good news is experience, and confidence, and memory, and revelation.

Just as the day dawns slowly - until as some point you can't believe it was ever dark - the pieces of Jesus story come together among the scattered witnesses - each with a different encounter; each with a different memory - until the evidence is so powerful that you can't imagine that you ever doubted. The tomb is empty and Jesus stands in their midst...eventually.

This is not our favourite telling of the easter story. We much prefer a glorious encounter between Jesus and Mary - she, much distressed, until Jesus calls her by name. Terror and amazement are emotions for the campfire, when we're trying to stave off sleep.

But Mark's account of that first day of the week is an important part of the story of salvation. The terror and amazement of the women sent them back to town with questions. Their awareness was heightened, and (one imagines) when the moment of revelation came for them - where ever it happened - they were ready.

Any tragic event has an effect on the way we see the world around us. Even through tears, that which is precious seems more precious, and that which is questionable raises more questions. Our extreme emotional responses often enable us to make changes that we would otherwise resist.

These women leave the tomb no longer sure about the most basic of realities. The impossible is now possible. Jesus is raised. Suddenly the most difficult task of that day has been swept aside by what can only be an Act of God. It will be good news, once all the pieces are in place - once they meet Jesus again.

Our Easter morning - with two thousand years of Christian history between us and that first day of the week - is not unlike the moment described in Mark 16. We know what we have to do. The pattern of our worship is well established; our long- weekend plans have become well-ordered, and are part of the revolving cycle of social necessity. And yet, those things are not here - the order of life has been wildly compromised. Our worship is different - our gatherings are small and isolated - our good news has been replaced with fear and frustration. We are working from what seems to be the wrong end of the emotional spectrum on this Easter Sunday.

But. Just as it was on that first day of the week, the stone has already been rolled away. The hard work of redemption is finished. Jesus has been raised - he is not here - he has gone on ahead. That is the news that should, even now, be able to change our perspective and activate our curiosity. The Good News of the resurrection is that the empty tomb pushes us to discover 'what's next?' Perhaps it's Jesus making breakfast on the beach, or breaking bread with two discouraged travelers to Emmaus, or maybe Jesus standing on the edge of town saying "go into the world - make disciples.'

Terror and amazement... These are the marks of urgency and excitement that opened the eyes of Jesus' friends so they could see the truth. This is what it took

to clear the grieving hearts and minds for just long enough that they could encounter Jesus in their midst. These are the emotions that started a movement that brought the message of God's loving, peaceable kingdom to the world.

This has been an emotional year and these extreme emotions have their purpose. Perhaps our eyes are now opened wide enough - maybe our hearts are just heavy enough - maybe we can finally encounter the good news as Good News. "You are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here."  
Hallelujah! Amen.