

Theme: - True or false (with regard to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead)

Now although we do not know all the women who visited the tomb on that Sunday to anoint Jesus, Mary Magdalene was one of them who is mentioned in all four gospels. Now there had to be several women in attendance at the tomb to roll away the large stone from the entrance.

In John's gospel 19:38 to 40 John records Joseph of Arimathea asking to take the body of Jesus away for burial and joining him was Nicodemus who brought one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to anoint Jesus before they sealed the tomb. So, although Mary Magdalene and the other women knew where they had taken the body of Jesus, they did not know that Nicodemus had already anointed Jesus on the day of his death and entombment, which for me is not at all surprising because it would be so much easier and healthier to anoint Jesus before sealing the tomb. I am also not surprised that the women were unaware of the anointing of Jesus by Nicodemus because there was so much going on that day, with Roman soldiers on crowd control and probably causing panic and chaos, as conquering armies tend to do.

Verse 2 from Luke's gospel says, "They (That is the women) found the stone rolled away from the tomb. There was recently a good film on the television entitled 'Risen' it was an account of Jesus's crucifixion, his rising from death and his activities before his ascension into heaven. The stone in the film was about six feet in diameter and looked about twelve inches thick so indeed it would have been heavy, but it did roll in a groove which may have made it slightly easier to move. The scenes I found interesting were the way the film illustrated the extent to which the Jewish authorities and the Romans collaborated together to try and stop rumours of Jesus having risen from death. Which was a problem for the Jews who wanted the Jesus sect destroyed and who had insisted on Jesus' crucifixion, and the Romans who just wanted to keep the peace, by sealing the tomb as reported in Matthew 27 verse sixty-four and mounting a Roman guard.

But when the women got to the tomb, they found the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, and the guards gone. Initially the women must have thought that while they were so grief stricken they had somehow come to the wrong tomb, but then realised that it was the right tomb; in which case where was Jesus's body. Their emotions were now probably a mixture of complete bewilderment, and fear of a Roman plot, which they had now inadvertently become a part of. One or two of the women may now be realising that all their hopes which had been building up over the years while they had been with Jesus had suddenly come to nothing, so were now wondering what it had all been about. It was only a week or so ago that they were rejoicing in his company, enthralled with what he was saying, and yet also astonished and trying to understand it all, and now nothing, not even a body to prove that he ever existed.

While they were trying to get their minds around to what had happened and indeed what was still happening, suddenly two angels in dazzling clothes were standing next to them having the appearance of men, as indeed do most angels. The women were terrified and bowed their heads to the ground. I am not surprised that they were terrified, but what did

surprise me was that they did not run away. But then in verse five the angels said a very profound thing, they said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead.” The angels comment, “Why do you look for the living among the dead.” reminds me of what Jesus said as recorded in Chapter 20 verse 38, just before our reading where he said, “Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living”. But the two men go on to say, “He is not here he is risen.” And added. “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and crucified, and on the third day rise again.” “Then they remembered his words.” The question I asked myself was, ‘which words were those that they remembered’?

In Mark 8:31 just after Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah Mark wrote, “Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and rejection by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” And there is compelling evidence that there were women disciples among his followers, including Mary Magdalene.

When the angels had completed their task, and the woman had declared that they now remembered what Jesus had said, ‘that he would rise from the dead on the third day,’ the women left the tomb and went back to where the disciples were. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother Of James, and all the other women that went to the tomb with them who told the apostles what had happened.

The next question for me was, “How do you tell somebody that a dead person, who everyone knew was dead, was now alive. Well, they tried to tell it precisely how it was, they said that they had seen the opened and empty tomb, which the disciples knew the Romans had sealed and were guarding. They also said that two angels had suddenly appeared and reminded them of what Jesus had said about rising from death on the third day. But after the disciples had heard all that had taken place, not surprisingly, the disciples dismissed it as an idle tale, verse eleven.

However, we also had a reading from St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians where Paul was explaining to his Corinthian listeners of the resurrection of Christ. The thing that struck me was that when the apostles and the other disciples who had been with Jesus for two years or more were told of the resurrection of Jesus they did not believe it. But when Paul started talking about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead to the pagan Corinthians they believed it; why was that?

It was because for the apostles there had been no Pentecost and therefore no Holy Spirit to teach or guide them. Whereas for the Corinthians there had been Pentecost and therefore they and we have the Holy Spirit within us teaching and guiding us, and we believe because of the Holy Spirit within us. So make sure this Easter that if you pray for just one thing, make sure that it is for the Holy Spirit to come to teach and guide you, and do not ask just the once, but keep on asking so that he knows you are serious.

But Peter believing that something happened at the tomb which, as yet, he could not understand, ran to the tomb to see for himself. On his arrival he went into the tomb and when he got in he saw the linen grave clothes by themselves; we do not know whether the linen cloths were neatly folded or simply collapsed as they would be if the body had

disappeared beneath them. Peter went home amazed verse twelve; now all the disciples including Peter only believed in the resurrection after they had physically seen the risen Christ; everyone else had to wait for Pentecost. The only exceptions were Mary Magdalene and the other women who God told through the angels at the tomb.

It cannot be over stressed that the story of the resurrection of Jesus is at the very heart, at the very nub, of our faith, and Jesus' remark about God not being the God of the dead but of the living is also revealing. Without the resurrection, Jesus is just a good man who died an awful death on a cross 2,000 years ago along with hundreds of others, but with faith that God had raised Jesus from the dead we have a future to look forward to, an eternal life of joy and love with Christ.

Rev. John White