

Mike's message

Easter, more than a Sunday.

In all likelihood, by the time that you read this, Easter Day will have come and gone. But Easter will be still with us. Why? Because Easter is about far more than one day, or even one week. Easter is a season in itself, as long as the season of Lent that precedes it. Easter is six weeks long. That's a lot of Easter eggs!

The Easter season is marked in our worship by accounts of how the risen Jesus was encountered by his followers. There's the tearful Mary, the first to encounter the risen Jesus, who mistakes him as the gardener before she recognises him and her grief turns to joy (*John 20 . 11 - 18*). The other frightened disciples are locked in an upstairs room when suddenly Jesus stands before them. Fear turns to delight. One, called Thomas, is missing, but a week later he too encounters the risen Christ (*John 20 .19 - 29*) and his faith is renewed. Then there are the couple, on their way home distraught after the events of the crucifixion, and puzzled by talk of an empty tomb. They meet a person on the road, who seems a stranger but, when they invite him to stay and he breaks the bread at a meal, they recognise him as Jesus. No longer distraught they make their way quickly and joyfully to tell others (*Luke 24 .13 - 35*). We hear of some of the disciples returning to their occupation as fishermen, but without success. With no fish in their nets they reluctantly take the advice of a man on the shoreline who tells them to cast on the other side of the boat. They do so, and their nets are filled. Then they recognise the man as Jesus. Their frustrations are turned to satisfaction and Jesus even satisfies their hunger at a lakeside barbecue! (*John 21 .1 - 14*).

These and other accounts of the risen Jesus (*see Acts 9 .1 - 31*) have one thing in common. Encounters with the risen Christ transform people. Easter is about transformation. Transformation in the way we live our lives, our attitude to others, our attitude to ourself. It's about new life, freed from all that has imprisoned us or weighed us down in the past. In the Resurrection even the power of death itself is transformed to new life. Like the stone outside Jesus' tomb, all that weighs us down or entombs us can be removed. How? Simply by realising that God in Jesus Christ loves us; unreservedly, unconditionally, unlimited.

Easter is more than a Sunday. It's even more than a season. It's for ever, in our lives and the lives of others. Mark's Gospel, in it's earliest form, doesn't describe any encounters with the risen Jesus. It ends with three women finding the empty tomb and fleeing in fear (*Mark 21 1 - 8*). Why does Mark finish his Gospel like this?

Could it be because he wants the next part of the account to be ours? Our encounter with the risen Christ. Yours and mine. That's why Easter's more than a Sunday, more than a season. It's forever. The transforming risen Christ lives in the lives of his people; in the past, present and into the future. That's why, instead of Christ has Risen, we proclaim:

Christ is Risen. Alleluia!

