

There is a bit missing from this morning's gospel, a bit which I am certain Luke would have recorded had he known how important it was. Our story begins with the women who followed Jesus from Galilee watching quietly from the sidelines to see where they, the men for burial was men's work, to see where they laid the body of Jesus. The women's work of anointing, wrapping and preparing the body for burial had to be curtailed, cut short, actually left out altogether because it was nearing sunset when the Sabbath would begin. There was not time for the women's work so the men simply go on with a quick, hasty burial for Jesus in a borrowed tomb. The women's work would have to wait until sunrise on the day after the Sabbath, Sunday morning. And we will come to Sunday morning in a minute for that is after all what we are here to celebrate today, Easter Sunday.

The bit which is missing from our Gospel story is the bit which I believe or imagine happened over that long Sabbath day between the men's work of burial and the women's work of anointing. I don't know what the Jewish equivalent is of *putting the kettle on* when the women would gather in the kitchen over a pot of tea or coffee, or whatever beverage 1st century Palestinian women preferred. I would have loved to have been there in that kitchen while these faithful, loyal women who followed Jesus from Galilee talked over, pondered the significance of the events they had been caught up in. Luke doesn't tell us who all the women were but they must have included Mary, Jesus mother, Mary of Magdala and Joanna among others. And I imagine they may well have fled Jerusalem for Bethany and met in the kitchen of Mary and her sister Martha. A comfortable home which had been a sanctuary for Jesus and his followers. It seems to me that they would have wanted to be somewhere comfortable and familiar while they reflected on the pattern and meaning of for their lives now that they had followed Jesus to the end of his earthly life.

It had after all been three years of excitement and hope following Jesus. Then there had been a week of emotional overload, no time yet for the real grief to begin. They had no chance yet to make sense of the life and death of Jesus let alone decide what the future might hold for them. Palm Sunday, just a few days before, had for some been a real turning point towards the coming of God's Kingdom. While others might well have predicted that it would end in tears!

Thursday, the Passover meal, as it turned out their last meal together. It was just like old time but somehow different. There was both intimacy and urgency in their sharing. Some might have seen it as a timeless interlude which held the threats of the outside world at bay for a little while. Others might begin to see how it was linked inextricably with all that followed. Then Thursday night, followed by the horrors of Friday. 24 hours of pure madness, pain and anguish all beyond bearing yet they needed to stay close and bear it. These women had no choice, no escape.

So the women *put the kettle on* and talked about all of it. About the hurried burial rights, the anointing, the prayers which had to be put right as soon as possible. Not, of course on the Sabbath, that was forbidden but as soon as possible, sunrise, on Sunday morning. There would have been questions: What now? Where do we go from here? questions with precious few answers except the biggest question WHY? I expect the stories of their time with Jesus began to be told and retold. The men wandering in from whatever they were busy *doing* to take their minds off of what had happened. For me this is where the gospel stories begin with the women and the disciples gathered in the sacred space of that Sabbath day.

But Luke tells us on the first day of the week, on Sunday morning, the women take up their work and return to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. Well into their sorrow comes JOY, not just a sort of gladness but pure, overwhelming JOY! The facts don't begin to cover what these first witnesses to the resurrection experienced. The stone rolled away, dazzling angels and Jesus risen and gone ahead of them to Galilee. And they remembered the things Jesus told them which did not make any sense at the time. Now they remembered Jesus words and REJOICED! You might see a familiar pattern here in the JOY, the JOY of beginning to glimpse that this was not the end they feared but rather a beginning they cannot yet imagine.

How many times did they repeat the story of this extraordinary, amazing morning to the disciples, to each other and to anyone who would listen. How many pots of tea did it take in that comfortable, familiar kitchen to find new ways, new words, new feelings to describe the indescribable; to believe the unbelievable? Yet they soon found that the JOY was contagious, sharing the good news with other brought greater joy. Sharing the good news of the risen Jesus helped the reality to sink in, to make it more real.

The JOY of the risen Jesus is not a private joy, for the women, the disciples or for us. It is not to be grasped and held close but rather to be shared and given away to others. The JOY of the risen Jesus grew then as it grows now in the telling and retelling. The gift of the JOY of the risen Jesus it only truly ours when we share it with others.

Part of me understands why my *missing bit* is not in the gospels because it is still taking place. The sharing of the good news, the JOY of the risen Jesus is the very basis of our faith. We have relived the events of Holy Week in our liturgies this week. We retell the story again in the death and resurrection events in our own lives through out the year. The Christian experience is about pondering, reflecting, sharing the stories of Jesus, and the stories of our own faith journeys to make sense of the JOY of the risen Jesus. The Christian mission of this or any other church is really quite simple. Our Christian mission is to give away the JOY of being an Easter people who live in JOY of the risen Jesus Christ. Alleluia!