

# The Parish of Bardsey with East Keswick

## Sermon

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### **Easter Sunday 31 March 2024: Angela Hannafin**

Happy Easter! Today we celebrate the victory of the empty tomb, of Jesus Christ who is not dead but still alive. Let's hear from Mark's gospel.

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<sup>1</sup>When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. <sup>2</sup>Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup>and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

<sup>4</sup>But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

<sup>6</sup>"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

<sup>8</sup>Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid".

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In our gospel reading this morning we read about the women who went to visit Jesus' tomb. The main question they had was about who would roll the stone away so that they could embalm the body. But when they got there, they found it had already been done.

The empty tomb of Easter morning made public the victory of Good Friday. It showed that what happened a few days before was not a gigantic failure but actually part of God's plan. All through Lent we've been thinking about how to listen to God. Now it seems that God had heard his people's cries for salvation and has now spoken in the most surprising way. God hadn't left Jesus all alone but had raised him to new life. As the young man, who we presume to be an angel said, he is not here, he has risen.

The empty tomb also answered some of the mysteries and questions that people had about this whole weekend. We'll look at some of those with the use of some punctuation. Who knew grammar could be fun? But it can help us understand what's gone on a bit more.

Firstly, the exclamation mark. What do we use one of those for? For drama! And there was a lot going on over the past couple of days. Can you imagine how the disciples must have felt seeing Jesus arrested and flogged. A criminal called Barrabas set free and Jesus sent to the cross in his place. And then to see Jesus dying on the cross. All their hopes had been on him, they'd left everything to be with him for three years, but now it seemed like it was all

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over. They would never forget seeing their teacher die before them. And now we read about these two women, going to the tomb expecting to embalm his body with spices. They must have been terrified by the angel who greeted them. Is it any wonder they ran away...it was all too much for them.

Secondly, the question mark. What is that for? For things we don't understand and want answers for. The disciples had always asked questions to Jesus, and often got things wrong. The things he had told them were hard to understand. And now they must have been saying to each other – so what was the Teacher telling us? Did he get it wrong? Did we get it wrong? It was so hard to work it all out. They were only simple men. The women must have gone away with questions too that morning – who could have moved that stone? Where was the body?

Thirdly, the full stop. It means the end of a sentence. No more words. It means the end. It must have felt like the end of the road for the disciples and all those who had supported Jesus – the women and families. Death was the last word, wasn't it? They knew Jesus' body had been taken down and put in a tomb, with a large stone rolled over. And there were guards outside the tomb. There's no way these the stone could be moved by anyone. And the dead body was going nowhere.

However – there had been a great cry from the cross at the end.

It is finished! In the Greek, this is a word which means completion such as when a bill is paid. When Jesus said it is finished, he meant not just his life but his work was done. Everything God had asked him to do, he'd done, from all those conversations with the disciples to all the miracles and healings, to the greatest work of all – dying on a cross. As the song goes that we've played in church this week – the work was done with nothing more than wood and nails.

And the question of the curtain in the temple where the Jews worshipped was solved. When Jesus died on the cross, it ripped from the top to the bottom. The curtain always had been there to keep the priest away from the people and the people away from God but now they could go to God directly. And the curtain was so high that no human could have ripped it. There was no mystery – God had done this.

The full stop – well, death was not the end. Jesus had walked out of the tomb. The stone had been rolled away. There was more.

Many people think that the events of this narrative are too much to bear and too dramatic! Others are not sure and have questions, some would like to believe but have doubts? Christians believe that this Bible story has led to many, many people joining Christian faith communities called churches, to them making Jesus the centre of their lives, so that all their decisions and values are based on what he said. Those people can all witness to their lives being different because of Jesus. As for myself, my life has been changed around and like the people in my congregation, I agree it's true. Life's full

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stop has been turned into a comma. There is more. There's more than Easter Eggs and chocolate too today. Our lives are so much better. We are known and loved more than any other person can love us. Because of what Jesus has done by rising from the dead, we are new people, with God's transforming love living in us guiding us forward. And we have the hope that this love will live in us with our ever-loving God, that his love for us is so strong and goes on even beyond the grave.

So let's give thanks to God that he has reached down and showed us his love, has rolled the stone away so that now we can live as people who are free to be with him forever. Hallelujah Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed!  
AMEN.