

2015 Easter Day.

Vicar Joyce.

Acts 10: 34-43, 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11, Mark 16: 1-8

For weeks we have had no flowers of joy. We have had a rough cross, the solemn purple and then red on the altar as we remembered the sacrifice of Jesus.

Were you surprised to see the lovely flowers in contrast this Resurrection morn? Or the bulbs and butterflies?

Tell me how you felt coming into church today.

Enjoy these symbols and let your lives bubble with joy, with new life.

Imagine the three women on the first Easter day. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus and Salome. Smell the spices and hear their sad wondering as to who will roll away the stone.

Yesterday it was mainly women who responded to the invitation to prepare the church.

Mark's account of the resurrection is a record of surprises. They came expecting to find the tomb securely sealed. Instead it was wide open. What a surprise! Are we open to Christ surprising us this Easter? Are our hearts open to the unexpected?

As Mark continues his account there is another surprise. They came expecting the dead body of Jesus, which they were going to reverently anoint. Instead they found a messenger of life who recognised that by now the three women were confused and afraid. Risking the unexpected is to know the uncertainty of the unfamiliar.

Are we open to a message of life this Easter? Are we also afraid of what we might find? It's all right to be afraid and unsure of ourselves – sometimes it's how we learn – and remember how often Jesus said to his friends: "It is I – don't be afraid."

The women listened to the messenger of life to learn where Jesus was to be found. He pointed to where Jesus had last been. He told them to let the disciples know that the risen Christ would be in Galilee and to go there. Did the group do that? No. These famous women whom we honour as the first receivers of the Resurrection message fled - half in excitement at the amazing message they had to share – half in terror that they would be ridiculed and disbelieved. What a surprise.

How strange that the first hearers of the good news were too afraid to tell the good news. They trembled in silence. They had lost the dead and had not yet found the

promise of the living. They were confronted with a message of life that was too extraordinary to believe. There is a surprise for us. The original gospel of Mark ends with this story, this verse. Some people were uncomfortable with this ending and early in church history more was added.

As you know I enjoy symbols. It can be very difficult to share the good news of faith, particularly with family and close friends. We can be like Mary Magdalene, or Jesus' mother or Salome. This year I want to help you see anew the wonder of Christ the resurrected, our friend and saviour, so you do not go home trembling, unsure of what to say or how to start.

Share instead a symbol of new life. Perhaps say that we were given it at this Easter service in this church and I would like you to have this to remind you of the risen Christ. You could take a bulb to give away or if you plant it yourself tell people when it flowers that it is a symbol of new life in response to Jesus rising from death. You may like to take a butterfly card and liken Jesus's journey from the tomb to being a new and beautiful life. Drop it in a letter box or post it, or make a yellow lily and give it to someone. You may like to blow away any fear and blow bubbles instead as a celebration, as we did at mainly music after reading the Easter book gift called, "it is a surprise".

Yesterday I was given an Easter egg. The egg was a hard boiled hen's egg with a tiny heart stuck on it. I shared it with others, so we all enjoyed the gift.

Jesus' love was not cautious, but extravagant. He did not love in order to get something from us, but gave everything of himself to us. He wanted us all to know that we are extravagantly loved, gifted with grace and empowered for new life. I invite you to tell this good news to others.