

Jesus Christ is risen – Alleluia

(Invite someone to open the Easter egg and share the contents with the congregation.)

What, it is broken, and there are no sweets?

As the Easter egg has just been unwrapped with the disappointment that it is broken and the sweets are not there – just an empty wrapper. )

So too, Mary and the disciples would have been horrified, not just at what had happened to Jesus on Good Friday, but now, it is just mind blowingly awful – they have taken his body as well. Not content with torturing and executing him – now they have stolen his body.

The first half of today's Gospel reading tells of first Mary Magdalene and then Peter and another of the disciples finding the tomb empty, with the conclusion that as yet they did not understand the scripture.

Cast your mind back to Good Friday. Those of you who came to Wanlip for the last hour saw the graphic telling of the Passion of Christ. Remember now that Mary Magdalene and these disciples would have spent yesterday reliving that horror. Unlike us they did not know that Christ is alive. That he has risen.

We know that the empty tomb was not because the body of Jesus had been stolen, moved or taken away, rather because Jesus is alive.

So please share the Easter egg. Break off a part of the tomb; break down the walls that held the body of Christ. It is a tomb no longer.

In the second half of the Gospel reading, Mary Magdalene was left alone, the disciples had returned home and she wept. And as she wept, she encountered the risen Christ. Jesus came to her in her pain. Jesus came to her, to a woman.

Jesus could have made himself known when the men were still at the tomb, but he waits. He waits until Mary is quiet, is looking into the empty tomb and weeping and then he makes himself known. It is then, and only then, that Mary Magdalene leaves the tomb, and races back to the disciples to tell them the most amazing news that Jesus is alive. That Jesus is risen.

Colin and I went to the cinema last week to see the new film 'Risen'. A film that I would think many of you may not have heard of; it is a film that tells the story of Christ's death and resurrection from the perspective of Clavius a powerful Roman Military Tribune.

Through the eyes of Clavius, a non believer, it tells the story of the hunt for the body of Christ; of the panic that ensues among the Roman soldiers when they discover that Jesus' body is not in the tomb. They seek to find the body, in an attempt to disprove what they see as the resurrection theory and to avoid an uprising.

It is a film that reveals Clavius' struggle to understand that the dead Christ and the risen Christ are one and the same person. Clavius had seen two things, which he couldn't reconcile: 'A man dead without question, and that same man alive again'. He goes on to say that he has 'set out to pursue Him, the Nazarene, to ferret the truth'.

And as Clavius ferrets about for the truth, he meets the risen Christ.

Today is the day to proclaim the resurrection. The core of the Christian faith; the resurrection is a revelatory event, an event that confirmed, identified and revealed just who Jesus is, that Jesus is divine, Jesus is the Son of God.

The reading from John's gospel is central to the telling of the resurrection, that Jesus is risen. The reading from Acts shows the centrality of the resurrection to the

Christian faith. It gives us a very clear directive about what we are called to do, with this knowledge that Jesus is not dead, he is risen.

We are to share it.

And share it some more.

The message that Mary Magdalene brought back from the tomb is not just for the disciples' consumption, not just for our benefit; not just to be for the chosen few, rather that we have been given a job.

The most important job of our lives.

To share with anyone and everyone that Jesus is alive and to show how Christ is at work in our lives.

Our current Link magazine gives examples of how God is working in the lives of some of the congregation. That doesn't mean that it is only those people who have God working in their lives.

God is alive and working in each one of us. The challenge is to discover, to recognise, and to identify how God is working in our own lives.

But it is often easier to see God at work in the life of another person; again we have to take those opportunities to say to the person what we can see God doing in the life of that person.

What people? If we look to the beginning of the Gospel passage it becomes very clear that the Gospel message is for everyone. Peter came to understand the Good news of God's extravagant and universal love. It is for the person who is considered to be outside the law, the person who is not like us, the person who makes mistakes, the person; well everyone. No-one is outside God's invitation.

In the film, 'Risen', Clavius took an active and physical part in the crucifixion of Jesus. Remember the clip from Good Friday and the joy and pleasure on the faces of the Roman executioners, and yet when he meets the risen Christ, well, that meeting blows his mind, as Jesus forgives Clavius for his part in his death. The forgiveness, that Jesus asked his father to give to those who had been in any way a part of his torture and execution, Jesus gives to Clavius.

It is this offer of forgiveness, the grace of God, that extends the message we heard on Maundy Thursday. The message of love. The message that we are called to serve one another as Christ served us. To show to the world that we are different, that we love and serve one another. A love, that calls us to love one another, even one who has perpetrated the worst of crimes.

And that is why on this Easter day, we are called to follow in the way of Christ, crucified and risen to love and to work towards a peaceful resolution in all conflicts whether in our own households or further afield such as those that have taken place in these last days, weeks and months as Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, Ivory Coast, Jakarta, Kandahar and so many more have been hit with terrorist bombings. So if we are living by God's impartiality and receive forgiveness for those things we do wrong, in the words that we say day by day, as Jesus taught us, we are called to forgive those who trespass against us.

In the film, Clavius received Christ's forgiveness. Later, the guard who had fallen asleep while guarding the tomb asked him, 'do you believe that the Nazarene is risen?' 'Yes' says Clavius, 'I believe'.

So we are called to act as Christ, with a faith that comes from the empty cross, from the empty tomb; from the empty grave clothes to the resurrected Christ, Jesus who is alive, Jesus who is risen. And by doing so we will share our love and faith in Christ through our loving actions with anyone and everyone, inviting them to get to know the risen Jesus we know and love.

Jesus Christ is risen – Alleluia. Amen

