

Easter Morning - 12th April 2020

Luke 24:1-12

Welcome everyone and Happy Easter. It's lovely to have you with us. I've got a couple of challenges for you this morning.

The first involves a £10 note and I'm wondering if you could jump over it whilst holding your toes! For those of you who decide to have a go, you will soon discover that it's an impossible task!

As too is the 2nd challenge. To try and tie a knot in a piece of string whilst holding it on each end and not letting go!!

These challenges are impossible to do (without cheating).

Today we celebrate Easter! In fact it is exactly a year ago since I first visited St Swithin's and joined you all for an Easter celebration. Today we celebrate together from our homes, but even though we may be fed up with being inside, or worried about friends, family and neighbours we still have a wonderful reason to celebrate!

On the first Sunday after Jesus death something seemingly impossible happened! Jesus, a 33 year old man who had been crucified brutally 3 days before rose from the dead....Look what the angel says in verse 6 – "He is not here; he has risen!"

This impossible truth changed human history for ever. It has changed the lives of billions of people and brought love and hope to our world in ways we can never imagine. For some it makes no sense but for many it is proof that God knows us and loves us profoundly and deeply.

Let's look at the story together....there are a number of things here which just seem impossible and yet....

What seemed to be impossible became possible

1. The stone was rolled away from the tomb. This stone was a whopper. Not just a little rock in front of a small hole where Jesus body was placed. In fact in one of the other accounts of the resurrection the women who go to the tomb ask themselves... How are we going to move the stone? It seemed an impossible task. In fact some historians suggest it could have been between 1 and 2 tons in weight – maybe possible for at least a couple of really strong people (dare I say guys) to roll in front of a hole, but much harder to roll it away, and the women who have already seen where Jesus was buried know it's too much for them. It just seems impossible.

And yet...verse 2 tells us that when the women arrive they find the stone has been rolled away! How on earth has that happened? We know that only one guard was posted to keep an eye on things, and he couldn't have moved the stone by himself. The fact is that the stone has moved and the women can go into the tomb. Matthews writes in his Gospel that it is angels who have moved the stone....which in itself is amazing! But most importantly, what was impossible has been made possible. The stone has moved.

2. A second impossibility. The women go into the tomb, and when go in “they do not find the body of the Lord Jesus.” It has gone. And that’s bonkers...because only two days earlier Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body and then took it down, wrapped it up and placed it in the tomb. The women were there. They saw this happen. They saw the body go into the tomb. Has it been stolen? It can’t have been because that stone was just too big and there was a guard keeping a watch. So what has happened? It just seems impossible.

And yet...the body is gone. I can’t imagine what that must have been like for those women. They had gone all prepared to see their dead friend, and to embalm him with spices and yet he is just not there anymore. Our passage says they were left wondering....do you think they were beginning to remember what Jesus had been teaching them in the last months...that he would suffer and die and then rise or do you think they were just deeply confused, bewildered and upset? Either way they are baffled because what is impossible seems to have been made possible.....

3. A third impossibility. Two angels are at the tomb – that seems impossible enough, and yet even more so they say to the women “why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen!” The women can see the cloth that Jesus has been wrapped in, folded and yet empty of a body. He is gone and impossibly they are told he has risen from the dead. But dead men don’t rise....do they? Perhaps at that point they remember Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead only a few days before....oh! Perhaps they do..

The angels testify to Jesus’ being risen. Jesus repeatedly told his followers that would happen. Not only that in one of the other accounts of this story Jesus actually appears and talks to Mary Magdalene in the garden by the tomb. He is really there. Not only that, in the weeks to come he appears to all his followers, he enjoys breakfast on the beach with them, and then it is recorded he appears to more than 500 people at one time. Jesus is walking and talking again and teaching. He’s not a ghost, but is the same and yet different. Wonderfully, beautifully, what seemed impossible has been made possible. Jesus is Risen from the dead and he is alive..

The bible is full of seemingly impossible miracles – just look at the world around us, created in all it’s beauty and intricacy, and that is just one!

Let’s think about the angels for a minute. It seems impossible that angels would appear to people and yet its not the first time that that has happened. Do you remember Christmas and the host of heaven appearing to Shepherds on a hillside and telling them a Saviour has been born. And the angel that appears to a young unmarried girl, and tells her she is going to have a baby. Also to her cousin Elizabeth who is not meant to be able to have any children. In Luke, chapter 1 right at the beginning of this story he writes, “Nothing is impossible with God.”

There are plenty of things that are impossible for human beings – it’s impossible to lick your elbow, or sneeze with your eyes open; it’s impossible to travel to the other side of the universe; it’s impossible to travel in time, and it’s impossible to accurately predict the weather more than a few days/weeks in advance.

But what is impossible for people is possible for God. Jesus is really alive - really risen...

So, what does this mean for us? Well it means lots of things, but here's one thing, during a time of crisis and lockdown in our homes, something that is an amazing truth.

Because Jesus is alive we can trust him. We can trust everything he says and we can trust everything he has done. We can trust him because he loves us, we can trust all his promises, that he forgives us, is always with us, we are never alone and we don't need to be frightened. We can trust that he is God, we are his children and that he loves us.

Because the impossible happened centuries ago, billions of lives have been turned upside down as they have trusted Jesus. It started with those few women who went to the tomb, but in the days following the other disciples would believe and would go joyfully into the world telling others the wonderful good news that Jesus is alive!

In years to come churches would spring up all over the world, and 2000 years later we now celebrate another Resurrection Sunday - Easter Day, along with at least 2 billion Christians across the world today. It seems impossible that from only 12 a worldwide faith could grow and yet that is the work of God....making the impossible possible because he loves his world that much and longs for as many people as possible to be His friends..

At a time when we might feel hopeless and despairing – when we are stuck inside perhaps fearful about corona and worried for our friends we can trust a God who keeps all his promises, who loves us so much that he did absolutely everything to bring us into relationship with Him and who offers us every hour of every day his love and comfort and most of all HOPE for eternity with Him. He is with us by His spirit, He loves us and we are His beloved. He brings comfort to the sad, joy to the despairing, forgiveness to the rebellious; life to those who feel hopeless and eternal hope to the fearful and lost.

And all this because 2000 years ago He made the seemingly impossible happen. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ - He is Alive – He is Risen. Hallelujah.

Prayer

Father God, we thank you for Jesus. Thank you that today we can celebrate his Resurrection; that he is alive and is with us by his Spirit. Thank you that we can trust Him and we pray that in the weeks to come we might enjoy his company and delight in his promises. May we know him better and love him more,

Amen.

Digging Deeper

Read the other Gospel accounts of the Resurrection – Matthew 28 vs 1-10; Mark 16 vs 1-8; John 20 vs 1-18 (and 19-31)

What else about the resurrection strikes you from these accounts?

What does it mean for you to trust Christ through these weeks of lockdown and global crisis?

What difference is the truth that Jesus is Risen going to make to you this week

- a) In your personal relationship with God
- b) In your relationships with others?