

All-Age Talk for Sunday 5th April, Year A, Easter Day

Preached at St John's Baillieston

John 20:1-18

All-Age Talk

How many of us like watching mysteries and crime dramas on TV?

Which one is your favourite?

What do you really love about them? Is it something about trying to unravel the clues before the tv detectives solve the case? Or do you just enjoy watching some interesting character being clever in a way we could never manage?

My partner Jane and I really love mysteries, but the problem for me is that Jane has such good intuition that she's often figured out 'whodunnit' by about half-way through the first episode! And even if she manages to keep her mouth shut and not ruin it, you can still feel the waves of smugness rolling off her when she's inevitably proved right.

Fortunately for Jesus it was Mary Magdalene who was doing the detective work at the empty tomb on Easter Morning. If it had been Jane, she would have been telling the angels what was going on and spoiling the plot!

That first Easter certainly was a bit of a 'whodunnit' – or maybe a 'whydunnit'. It has all the key ingredients: an unexpected mystery to be solved, a rather unlikely detective on the case who's a bit of an outsider and likely to be ignored by the authorities, some surprising clues to be uncovered, a case of mistaken identity, and a completely extraordinary twist at the end of the investigation!

But I wonder how closely *you* were listening to our gospel story? I wonder how well you'd do if you were trying to solve the case and figure out why Jesus isn't in the tomb.

In fact, why don't you get into little teams with the people sitting around you. I'm going to ask you some questions and maybe we can figure this mystery out together. Remember, if you're really stuck you might find some clues in the pewsheet!

Q: So, here's the first question: Who can remember what day of the week and what time of day our story began?

A: Yes! Early on Sunday morning! And notice that it was still dark – that might be important later.

Q: Next question: Does anybody know what had happened three days before, on Good Friday?

A: Yes! Jesus had been put to death on a cross.

Q: Now here's a much more complicated question, does anyone know why Jesus was put to death?

A: (Lots of possible good answers – the religious leaders thought he was pretending to be God, which would have been hugely wicked, if it wasn't true. And they thought he might upset the Romans by declaring himself king of Israel. And they hated that he was loving and including people they thought should be excluded from polite society. And they didn't like the way he was criticising them for all the selfish and cruel things they'd been doing). So even though Jesus had done nothing wrong, the religious leaders felt threatened by the extraordinary things Jesus did and said, and so they conspired with the Romans to have him put to death.

Q: Going back to the tomb, did anyone notice the first clue Mary discovered that made her immediately go running back to the city to find two of Jesus's disciples? And what do you think she assumed had happened?

A: Yes! The big, heavy stone covering the entrance to Jesus's tomb had been rolled away and Mary thought someone must have taken his body. It seems like a reasonable assumption, doesn't it? Even today in some countries when a dissident leader is arrested and 'disappeared', the authorities want to make sure there's no body left behind to become a focus for protests!

Q: Now, can anyone remember the names of Jesus's two other friends and which of them ran fastest?

A: Well done! Peter and John – and John got there first! We don't know how far they had to run so we don't know whether they were sprinters or marathon runners, but John was definitely faster. But Peter was the one who went into the tomb first – perhaps he was braver?

Q: What evidence did they find and what did they do next?

A: The evidence Peter and John found in the empty tomb were the linen grave cloths that had been wrapped around Jesus's body. I wonder if that's important. If the Romans had come and moved the body, would they have bothered to unwrap it?

Peter and John didn't really understand what had happened though, so they just went back home. Not very persistent detectives!

But Mary still wanted to solve the mystery, and she stayed behind by the tomb. Although she was feeling very upset and confused, Mary didn't give up - she kept trying to work out what happened. She had loved Jesus so much she didn't want to leave until she got some answers.

I wonder how you might have been feeling if you'd been there, and what you might have done? Who would have gone back to bed like Peter and John, and who would have stayed with Mary?

Q: When Mary looked inside the tomb again after her friends had gone, what amazing new clue did she see?

A: Yes, two angels!

Not an everyday occurrence! Mary must have been totally amazed to see them sitting there!

The angels asked her why she was crying. Mary must have thought it was a stupid question. I mean, why did they *think* she was crying? But with hindsight and if she hadn't been quite so upset, perhaps Mary might have realised that question was another clue! If the angels saw no reason to be crying, maybe nothing bad had happened?

And as if the angels and their strange question wasn't extraordinary enough, then something even *more* amazing and extraordinary happens.

Q: Who does Mary see when she turns round?

A: Yes! It's Jesus! He also asks her why she's crying and who she's looking for ...

Q: Does anyone remember who Mary thinks this is?

A: Yes! Mary thinks at first that Jesus is a gardener!

Q: I wonder why Mary didn't recognise him straight away? Do you have any ideas?

A: Perhaps it was either still too dark to see clearly or perhaps the sun was beginning to rise and was dazzling her. Perhaps Mary had been crying so hard that her eyes were full of tears and her sight was all blurry. Perhaps Mary didn't make eye contact with Jesus because she was all on her own in the garden and she thought he was a stranger. Perhaps Jesus looked very different from the last time Mary had seen him, just after he'd died, when his face and body would have been bruised and bloodied after being tortured and crucified. Perhaps his resurrection body had changed from his original body.

Q: What clue does Jesus give Mary to help her to recognise him?

A: Yes! I always find this incredibly moving – Jesus calls her by her name, “Mary!” and instantly she recognises him, because if you love someone and they call you by your name, aren't you always going to recognise them, even if it's dark?

Q: I wonder how it might feel to you to hear Jesus call you by *your* name – to be for a moment the centre of all his loving attention.

So, Mary has solved the mystery! The twist is that Jesus's dead body isn't missing – it hasn't been removed and taken somewhere else – and there's no need to try to figure out who's taken the body, because Jesus is no longer dead! HE'S ALIVE!

And so we come to the end of our little Easter 'mystery', but I'm going to leave you with a couple of questions that you might like to take away and ponder.

The first is: I wonder what difference you think it made to the rest of Mary's life knowing that she'd solved the mystery of the empty tomb and that her beloved teacher and friend, Jesus, had been raised from the dead?

And the second question is this: I wonder what difference the resurrection of Jesus Christ makes to *your* life? What is *your* answer to the question Jesus asked Mary – “For whom are you looking?” What do *you* think it was all for?

Come back next week if you want to find out what happened next!