

Sermon preached at Eaglehawk Uniting Church,
Easter Sunday 2013 31st March
Rev Ralph Clarke
Readings: Isaiah 65 :17-25; Luke 24: 1-12

An empty grave, angel like messengers, the dead raised to life. Luke says the women's story seemed to the apostles to be like an "idle tale". An idle tale sounds like a tall story, or a bit of fun, like a gag being told by a raconteur in a pub. They thought the women were having them on. People don't mind a bit of funny nonsense. Some engage in a lot of it. There's a lot of it in the media, at parties & in comedy shows. Nonsense. A bit of harmless fun not to be taken too seriously. Some places celebrate Easter by telling jokes. Scots have a tradition of rolling stones down a hill. A bit of nonsense can lift our spirits, take us out of our usual ways of thinking and behaving.

I tend to take a fairly rational approach to things but I doubt that's what Luke asks for in this reading. What if the reference to an empty tomb is an invitation to step inside & explore a bit? What if the point of the empty tomb is not to let Jesus out, but to let us in? Maybe Jesus invites us to think of the tomb as a place to play with all the sadness in life involving terrorists, suffering, death, or what our future will be. It's as if he is saying come with me. I've taken care of all that. I'll lead you through all those things to something better. Don't spend your life mourning. Come & play with me. Let's enjoy a bit of nonsense together - nonsense about life out of death, & a future you can't make for yourself.

In my younger days I did rifle shooting practice on cormorants - water birds that dive every time they sense danger. Cormorants were hard to hit when they were on the water. Not only did they have a small head & neck. When they dived you never knew where they would reappear next. They remind me of the risen Jesus. He kept turning up in the most unexpected places & never let people pin him down too much. It was as if he was having fun with people & saying - trust me to be wherever you are.

Jesus has been set free. He's free to appear anywhere, free to lead us to life beyond death, free to laugh in the face of all who belittle & brutalise others like the Roman soldiers. He calls his followers to this freedom also, free to challenge injustice, & to work for a new world, & for the new life that has begun through Jesus. Perhaps he is encouraging us to think of sharing his new life even as we face death, or letting his love replace our hatred & his forgiveness replace our bitterness. This Easter story invites us to celebrate new life.

The angels ask, "Why look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen". Then, "REMEMBER how he told you while he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again."

The Greek word for remembering is anamnesis (ἀνάμνησις) – a recalling & re-telling of what had happened - going over it all again, like we do when we tell our friends how a loved one died, or like when we show friends how someone did a trick, or when we share a joke we've heard, mimic someone's habits – how they talk or look. In medical practice it's an invitation for a patient to recall the history of their illness. It is re-living the story & the event.

When we do this retelling, the story often becomes fresh for us & for all who have forgotten, or have never known the story. In the Easter story we are asked to remember Jesus predictions that he would suffer, die & be raised. Anamnesis is the same root word Luke and Paul use for the Holy Communion, "Do this in remembrance of me" This remembering is a living memory of how the Christ not only was present in the past, but will be present now & in future.

Remembering is not always easy for us as we get older. Sometimes the brain cells don't connect very well. But this is about re-hearing the story as we do today, & letting it be a reminder of the hope we have.

This remembering can be a powerful activity. In 1977, Archbishop Luwum was murdered in Uganda on the orders of President Idi Amin. Unlike Pilate, Amin refused to release the Archbishop's body for burial & banned any funeral gathering. In the grounds of the cathedral however the grave had already been dug & thousands of people gathered there in spite of the risk that Amin's soldiers would open fire on them. One

woman described what happened next. She said, "Our eyes fell on the empty grave. Then the words of the angels to the two women on Easter morning flashed into our minds. "Why do you seek the living among the dead"? The people erupted into a song of praise – for life, not death. She said, we came away healed by the revelation from the empty grave."