

Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." *Matthew 28.7.*

One of the most remarkable things about the Jewish religion, (the religion of Jesus himself, of course), is that it doesn't go in for *evangelism*. It's not a *proselytising* religion. There are no Jewish missionaries. It's true that people can and do convert and become Jews, but it's rare, and you won't find a committee in the synagogue devoted to evangelistic outreach. Jehovah's Witnesses come knocking on your door, but you've never seen *Jews* knocking on your door, or been invited to Jewish missionary rally, have you?

And yet *Christianity* is fervently evangelistic. We want more and more people to be converted. We spend millions of pounds and invest huge amounts of training in equipping preachers, evangelists, missionaries to spread the good news at home and abroad. Christianity, of course, grew *out* of the Jewish religion. We proclaim Jesus as the Messiah promised in the OT, the NT as the fulfilment of the OT, but nothing marks Christianity off as more *different* from Judaism than this tremendous desire to go out and spread the word.

What could possibly explain this huge difference? Is it just triumphalism, the rather ugly wish to make everyone think like us? No, I don't think so, although, of course, there have been some rather shameful periods in the history of the Church when we *have* been too keen on conquest and control.

What changed changed Christianity from being an introverted sect of Judaism to an explosion which now looked *outwards* was Easter Day. True, Pentecost, fifty days later

gave Christians the *power* to reach out, but the shocking events of Easter Day gave them the *reason* to reach out. On this day some 2,000 years ago, God shocked the world by doing something seemingly impossibly: he raised his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, from the dead. Pontius Pilate for his reasons, and Caiaphas and the Jewish clerics for *their* reasons, thought they'd finished this upstart carpenter Jesus off, by having him crucified. But God had other plans. He would not let death have the last word. God refused to allow hate and sin and envy to have the final say. Love and life would triumph, and be *seen* to triumph.

If we go back to our scripture reading from *Matthew* on p1000, ch28, we see how the women came to the tomb and, to their utter astonishment, found the stone rolled away. V4 is interesting: the implication is that the terrified soldiers were still there, when the women arrived, vv2-5a... The angel then tells them the amazing news, v6... and then he says v7, 'Go *quickly* and tell his disciples, "He has risen from the dead."

'Go and *tell* them', the angel commands the women. You see, from Easter Day we now have something to *tell* the people. It is something so utterly wonderful and amazing that we should all go *quickly* and tell others. If you had found the cure for world cancer, would you keep it to yourself? Even if you were a naturally shy and retiring person, you wouldn't be able to contain yourself. And especially if you had some loved one in hospital suffering from cancer, you would rush into that hospital so fast to tell the doctors, 'Look, I've found the cure. Stop what you're doing. Use *this* - please!'

Let me tell you now that at Easter we found something far more wonderful *even* than the cure for world cancer. When God raised his Son from the dead he gave us hope beyond the grave. He told us that we need no longer fear death. We need never say that we have *lost* a loved one. We have *not* lost them, for nothing, not even death now can separate us from God's love. All that separates us from our holy God is our own sin, and that has been dealt with at Calvary's Cross. Easter is the wonderful assurance that love triumphs over hate. We all desperately need to hear this. And that is why we must go *quickly* and tell people.

Of course it's hard to believe. It isn't natural that the dead come to life. It's not the case that today we're all scientific and rational, so we're not as gullible as they were 2,000 years ago. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection in Jesus's time. Doubting Thomas didn't believe. Mary in the Garden didn't believe, nor did Cleopas and his companion going to Emmaus that first Easter Day. they only *believed* it when they actually saw the risen Jesus, and touched him and spoke with him. They needed convincing also. But once they knew it was real, there was not stopping them.

What I am trying to say, is that we Christians today have something to tell people. Yes, it's literally unbelievable, but it's true, and it's wonderful, and it changes everything. It changes everything we used to think about life. It makes us even face death in a completely different light.

But, do you know what? we've shrunk back to the old inward-looking ways of the Jews. You can join us if you want,

but we're not bothered. Dear friends, since Easter, we have something to tell others about, even more wonderful than the cure for world cancer and world poverty.

I don't know whether you read last month's *Reform*. The arch-liberal, the American Bp John Shelby Spong was invited to write about the Resurrection. Out came the usual stuff. Jesus wasn't *really, physically* raised from the dead. The NT writers might have *said* that, but we today know what they really meant to say. No. The change wrought by God came not in Christ's *body*, but in the disciples' *minds*. Oh dear, oh dear! God can only do what our little minds can understand. What puny expectations liberals like Bp Spong have of God. He isn't really a God who is able, is he? He can't really save us *to the uttermost*, because he can't *actually* raise his Son from the dead. And aren't we grateful to Bp Spong for shewing us that the NT writers are actually either liars or deluded?

Listen, friends! Thomas, Mary, Cleopas, *and* that Christ-hater Saul of Tarsus, were just as sceptical as dear Bp Spong. It *is* incredible that there should be a God who can actually and physically raise his Son from the dead. That's precisely what makes it so wonderful. It is wonderful that Jesus could rise from the dead and be present to us now in this bread and wine. If, like Bp Spong, Jesus lives on only as a pretty idea in the disciples' minds, then frankly we have absolutely nothing to tell the world. Perhaps that's why our churches are closing. They *deserve* to, because they have nothing to say. But if we take the gospel account as they *intended* us to take it, then we've got a great message. So go and *tell* someone.