

RENEWING OUR FAITH.
JOHN 20:1-9.

John's account of the resurrection of Our Lord is proof that he was relating what he himself witnessed. The details are so graphic that someone who was there could only have told it. John remembers that Mary Magdalene came to him and Peter very early on that Sunday morning, just before dawn. She had been to the tomb. Obviously she couldn't sleep. Grief induces insomnia. When you are grieving in the middle of the night, it seems that the day will never come; and you are not at all certain that you ever want it to. So Mary had got up before daylight and went to the grave. That was the only place she wanted to be. But on her arrival, she was amazed to find the tomb open. The stone, which was heavy, had been rolled away. She was frightened, but got close enough to see, even in the darkness, that the body of Jesus had gone. Her immediate thought was that someone had stolen the body of Jesus. What was she to do? Only one thought entered her mind. Peter and John must hear of this.

The next thing John relates were Peter and himself running to the tomb. For a time they ran side by side, but John who was in better condition ran faster and got to the tomb first. He stood there in the half darkness, bent down, looked into the tomb, trying to figure out what had happened. Then Peter arrived and in his typical fashion went straight into the tomb. Now John went in. By this time, there must have been enough light for them to see. Mary was right; the tomb was empty. There were only the grave clothes. In one place was the sheet that had covered the body of Jesus; and in another place was the cloth that had been around His head. This was neatly folded and laid aside.

None of this gave the appearance of people in a hurry. If someone had stolen the body of Jesus, why should they take the time to remove the sheet that enfolded Him? And why should they neatly fold the head cloth and lay it in another place. The theory that someone stole the body of Jesus just didn't hold water. It looked as if Jesus had calmly changed His clothes and walked away.

At this point, John, spoke about himself when he wrote, 'He saw and believed.' This suggests that John was the first one who believed in the resurrection. Some people find it easier to believe than others. John was one of those people. He hadn't seen the risen Lord, nor talked with anyone who had. He didn't even understand the Scriptures that prophesied His rising. The only evidence he had was an empty tomb and some abandoned grave clothes and that was enough for him to believe.

At one point of his life, John had believed in Jesus so strongly that he left everything to follow Him. As the weeks and months went by, he had come to believe in Him more and more. The way that Jesus lived seemed right, the things that He taught made sense, the man that He was seemed the most real thing in the world. John's total conviction about God, about life and about himself had come to revolve around Jesus. The person of Jesus made sense of everything. Then that day on Calvary, his faith had been dealt a mortal blow. Jesus who was his best friend had gone. He had found Jesus to be truth in the midst of confusion; light in the vast sea of darkness; the eternal life of God surrounded by human mortality. Now where was He? At that moment everything that John believed in was shaken to the core.

Then standing there in that empty tomb, 'He saw and believed.' John is telling us that it was the sight of the empty tomb that resurrected and strengthened his faith. All that he had hoped for and believed in came rushing back. For a moment his life had been turned upside down, but once again it was turned the right way up. He had not been misled after all.

This is precisely what you and I need this Easter Sunday morning--not simply to believe in the objective truth of the resurrection, but to have our faith in Jesus renewed. This world has a way of playing havoc with the things we believe in. The world tries to tell us that in our modern secularised society, Jesus is irrelevant, and religion is irrelevant. Everything that Jesus stands for gets shoved aside, trampled on and even crucified almost every day that we live.

Let us be honest and admit that there are times when we are really afraid to let go of our lives and let God take the reins. We are afraid to trust Him for we know we shall make fools of ourselves. Jesus talked about loving our enemies, turning the other cheek, going the second mile. What place has these things in our modern world? The only thing that works is the law of the jungle, the survival of the fittest. Try turning the other cheek in a business deal and see how far it gets you. This is a dog-eat-dog kind of world, and those who do not face that fact either get run over or left behind.

Isn't it true that this is how we think?

This world did to Jesus the very worst that it could. It rejected His truth and nailed Him to a cross. But on the third day He overcame it all, even death. John saw and believed. That is precisely what you and I need this Easter morning--a renewal of our faith in the risen Christ.