



Sermon by Rev Ross Pearce Highfield Road Uniting Church Easter Day, March 27, 2016

Luke 24: 1-12

Something happened! On that morning, days after the crucifixion, something happened! The most ancient sources say that the women found an empty tomb when they went to perform the funeral rights for the body. Even the later stories still tell us that the disciples and the women were confused and frightened, or wondering why the body would be taken. Something happened! If you follow the unfolding story in the Gospels, Jesus tells the disciples that he would be killed and rise again, but when it happened they were confused and astonished. Many theories have been put forward over the centuries – the disciples took the body, the women got confused in their grief and went to the wrong grave, Jesus only fainted and came to life again, the disciples came to the realisation that Jesus was still with them in spirit – however, while those various theories might cover the story of the resurrection, they fail to explain the consequences of the resurrection. Something happened that turned a small group of simple men and women into a collection of churches all the way around the Mediterranean in the space of a generation. Something happened that led a group of Jews, who were raised to believe in one God and to exclude other races, to suddenly confess Jesus as Lord - i.e. God - and to welcome into their fellowship people from all races. Something happened that turned simple fishermen into powerful public speakers. Something happened that led men and women, who running from the authorities in fear of being crucified themselves, to become bold leaders of a new faith. Something happened! And while many of us have difficulty in accepting what the Gospels say happened, the only option to the Gospels is mystery.

Something happened that led the disciples to become, not more faithful and devout Jews, but followers of Jesus whom they now called Christ. And the marks of that new faith are what we are sharing in today; baptism and communion. Those two sacraments are proclaiming God's loving welcome in Jesus Christ louder and more meaningfully than anything that I can say now. Here is the grace of God and the outpouring consequences of the resurrection on display for all to see. The conquering of death and the gift of new life that is symbolised in both the water and the wine and bread. Here is our ongoing celebration of that something that happened! Mystery, symbol, faith and the lived experience of generations upon generations are all bound up in these symbols that are at once deeply personal and at the same time the marks of a community of faith. Jesus died and in some way is alive again and those disciples and women were as good as dead in

their grief and disappointment and they came to life in the faith of a living Lord Jesus and a living God.

Far from being an irrelevant, literalist religion, we are the carriers of a living faith in a living Lord Jesus. Something happened! And that something still has the power to transform lives here and now. Lives trapped in the fear of death, lives trapped in the tombs of worry and despair, lives trapped in the endless cycles of satisfaction and disappointment. Something happened that can bring meaning and purpose and contentment. God raised Jesus to new life and, in response to that great display of grace and power, God can raise us to new life. A new life of faith that proclaims to all that something happened! That is the Good News of our faith. Not that religious practice can bring us to God but that God did something in Jesus that can bring us to God. Something happened ... and nothing is the same anymore.