

## **The first Easter shutdown**

Jesus' disciples were in self-isolation. They had withdrawn to their homes, confused and worried. Were the authorities out to get them as they got Jesus? They had gone home after the crucifixion on Friday, and they were still there. On Easter Sunday morning, a few of the women had ventured out. As dawn was breaking, Mary Magdalene, Salome, another Mary and Joanna made their way to the tomb where Jesus' body lay.

### **Missing**

Arriving at the tomb, they found it open. The seal had been broken, the entrance stone had been moved and those who were supposed to be guarding it had gone. It was like getting back from a holiday and finding your front door open. Scary, and you fear the worst. Then it got stranger still. The body of Jesus was missing. And his graveclothes were still there.

### **Message**

Then someone spoke, addressing the women – and the world. 'Do not be afraid . . . he has risen.' The speaker is variously described in the Gospels as: 'an angel of the Lord whose appearance was like lightning', 'two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning', and 'a young man in a white robe'. Stunned, the women ran off to tell the disciples. A memory of Jesus saying he would be raised from the dead stirred at the back of their minds.

### **Four appearances**

Running to the disciples was not straightforward. They were interrupted by none other than the Lord Jesus, and clearly very much alive. Jesus also appeared to Mary Magdalene when she later returned to the empty tomb. When he first spoke to her, she was crying and thought he was the gardener. Peter also had a one-to-one appearance, following his wretched denial two nights before. In addition, one couple, getting some exercise walking to Emmaus, suddenly recognised that their companion, walking and talking with them, was the Lord himself.

### **Lockdown**

That evening, the disciples were still fearful, behind locked doors. Self-imposed lockdown. Despite the locked doors, Jesus came and stood among them, a fifth appearance of the day. He said, 'Peace be with you!' He showed them his scarred

hands and side. It really was their Jesus. How glad they were to see him! Relief, excitement and questions galore must have swept over them. There was no mistaking it. He really was risen from the dead and standing in the room beside them. He even asked if they had anything to eat, and they watched as he ate some fish.

### **In our midst**

As prisoners and sick people have always known, locked doors and isolation wards are no barrier to the risen Christ. In our state of shutdown and isolation, the risen Christ is still 'standing here in the midst of us', in our home or at our workplace. He stands alongside us, to bring peace, strength, healing and hope. 'Peace be with you!' are his Easter words to us too.

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