

Easter Morning **Mark 16:1-8**

A few years ago a man called Michael Lloyd came and spoke at a diocesan conference. Bishop Lee will remember this. Michael described a scene from *The Big Bang Theory*. Now, if you are the kind of person that reads *The Daily Telegraph* and goes to concerts where the viola da gamba is being played, I should explain that *The Big Bang Theory* is a US sitcom, the principle characters are socially inept academics at Caltech, in California, the sort of people who have doctorates in theoretical physics. And if you are that *Daily Telegraph* reader that may not be a programme you will ever watch and this anecdote is probably not what you came to the cathedral to hear this morning, but bear with me, I promise there is some theology coming.

Two characters, Leonard and Sheldon, share a flat. Leonard wants the flat to himself for an evening with his girlfriend, Leslie Winkle. This is tricky, Sheldon does not want to go out and he loathes Leslie Winkle. So we find Sheldon sitting on the stairs, playing on a Nintendo and seething with injustice. Another friend, Penny, finds him there and asks him what he is doing, Sheldon replies,

Leonard is upstairs right now with my arch-enemy

Your arch-enemy?

Yes, the Dr. Doom to my Mr Fantastic, the Dr. Octopus to my Spider-Man, the Dr Sivana to my Captain Marvel

Okay, (says Penny) I get it, I get it

You know it is amazing how many supervillains have advanced degrees

Penny tries to calm Sheldon down, she explains to him that if he wants to be a good friend to Leonard he should support him, make it easy for him and for Leslie Winkle. Sheldon's eyes narrow, why should he make all the effort?

*If Leonard is really **my** friend why doesn't he have to support **me** in my hatred of Leslie Winkle?*

Because love trumps hate

Oh. (says Sheldon) Now you are just making stuff up!

Love trumps hate, that could be the sermon for Easter morning. But, it is not. I want to say something else. First I want to say something to our candidates for confirmation...

Connie, Ethan, Ira, Ollie, Poppy and indeed Tom and Brian

I want to say great and well done, this is such a good day for us, to have you doing this, we are delighted. And then I want to ask you - *What you think you are doing?* As you get ready for confirmation we have confirmation classes as though this is all about teaching you, SATS and GCSEs, grade four on the nose flute and then a pass with trumpets and herald angels in confirmation. That is not right. All this, this Confirmation is not about what you know.

The guys from *The Big Bang Theory* live in their heads, they are obsessed with higher degrees and all that learning and even they notice that supervillains do that too. Knowledge does not save you. Faith is not about what you know. Years ago, up the road a man was dying, a priest came to see him, a priest who had been an engineer and became a priest late in life. The dying man asked him *why did you become a priest?* He replied

Because this is the first pool I stepped into where I couldn't feel the bottom.

That's better, that's more like it. *Connie, Ethan, Ira, Ollie, Poppy* you are doing this, this morning, not because you know stuff and have it all sorted, but because you are still looking, you *don't know*, but you are prepared to look *here*. You are at the edge of the ocean, you will not feel the bottom, but it is certainly going to be interesting.

Now, let's think about Easter Day and that reading from St Mark.

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus]

Notice the names, Mark is working hard, he wants us to know it was *her* and it was *her*. That is because he has told us about these women before. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses stood near the cross, they saw Jesus die. They also saw him being buried. No one else saw both those things. The disciples had fled they could not bear it; they were not there. These women had seen Jesus die and they saw him buried. They knew that Jesus was dead.

This is a really important part of the Easter story. In the chaos of chocolate today, amongst the cards and the Happy Easters, we have to remember this is not a happy ending to the story. The story is not, absolutely not, that Jesus was dead and now he is alive again. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses can put you right. He was dead, he is still dead, he did not come back to life, it is not *as you were, that did not really happen*. Whatever happens at Easter, it does not make it all suddenly OK. The cross is still agony, it is still injustice and death is still death. Love does not trump hate. Hate sometimes prevails, at least for a time.

Mark's gospel shows us Jesus suffering starkly silently. It is a bleak picture he paints. It is still bleak this morning. There is an odd detail in Mark. On the night that Jesus was arrested the disciples could not get out fast enough. They ran away. Jesus was deserted. One of them, not one of the twelve, was really desperate

A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked. Mark 14:51-52

A linen cloth, did you notice? Mark told us that for a reason. On that first Easter morning, he says the women went to tend to Jesus' dead body,

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side;

A young man ran away naked. Now a young man sits, he stays, and he is clothed. It is the same story, but this time it reads differently. Death is still death, violence is still cruel, but now a young man stays and does not run away.

he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here

This is the Easter story. That God in Christ was seen on Calvary; was there, in the pain and the horror. Was there and did not effect a last minute rescue, change the story, ride in on a charger.

Does love trump hate? No, not always, it did not do that on Calvary. Mocked, crucified, dying as one accursed Jesus did not suggest that somehow all that horror was not quite real, that it would all be OK, happy ever after. God on Good Friday in that story says 'This too is mine'.

On Easter Day all that is still true, the horror goes on. But now the young man tells us that the Jesus who was so utterly *there* in the furnace of Calvary has *gone ahead*. The story of Good Friday does not suddenly become untrue, it is just not the *only* story any more. There is still hate, but love, at Easter, goes ahead and asks us to follow.

And the disciples who, in Mark's gospel consistently failed to follow, finally accept. They do follow. That is the Easter gospel to know death and still believe that love goes ahead, ...and to follow. That is the journey the confirmands make. It is a journey you and I are asked to make too. To follow.