

Welcome, and peace to you all this Easter-tide.

Here is a set of Bible study notes I concocted for my group in Oakdale to use, to keep us together while we can't meet, except by phone. I would be delighted if anyone else found them interesting, stimulating, helpful, - or whatever. Please use them as suits you, on your own or with a friend. Do let me have some feedback, though, plus or minus, or any questions you would like to raise. My phone no: 01202 683201.

Love and best wishes to you all. Ann Johnson LLM (PTO)

St.George's Bible Study Group. 2020

"It's true – the Lord has risen."

Week 1. April 22nd. "Hail thee, festival day-"

We start with the first Gospel to be written, (as most people think,)by John Mark, using material he had learnt from Peter, for the church in Rome about 65AD. By this time both Peter and Paul had been martyred. It is a very brisk and matter-of-fact account.

Read: Mark ch.16. 1-8a.

How familiar are you with this version of the story?

Start a list of all the women in the story, and add to it as the weeks go on.

Imagine you are one of these women; how do you feel about going to the tomb so early?

What did you think when you saw the tomb – not only open, but empty – no body?

Mark says "a young man in white" – who was he? An angel in disguise or a human out and about even earlier, being used by the Lord as his messenger? (What other young man have we met in Mark's story recently?)

What two points did Jesus make in his message to them?

Their reaction – why should they have been so afraid and not told anyone?

This is a very sudden end to the account. All the rest of the chapter seems to be later additions by other writers. Any ideas why this might be?

Matthew's Gospel written about 85-90 AD uses most of Mark's material, but differently edited, and with many additions.

Read: Matthew 28. 1-10.

This is a much more graphic account. We do have a properly supernatural angel here, who talks to the women and invites them into the tomb.

What else is different in this version? The women's response? Who else they saw? The form of the message?

The earthquake – is it real? An after-shock from Friday's, or is it symbolic of emotional or cosmic upheaval? Or both? What about the other people involved that Matthew talks about – why has he included them?

Week 2. April 29th. "Fought the fight; the battle won."

Luke, a Greek, is writing in much more idiomatic Greek. He is telling the same story, with some of his own material, and writing about 75-80 AD, so about half way between Mark and Matthew.

Read Luke 24. 1-12.

What differences do you notice in his details? Two men in white, not just one, and they remind the women of things Jesus had said to them in his teaching to prepare them for this to happen. What is the

significance of two, not just one?

How would you feel when your wonderful news to the apostles was disbelieved?

Luke adds an account we get from no-one else.

Read Luke 24.13-35.

Cleopas and A.N.Other – who was it? Look back at John 19. v.25. I think Mary, wife of Clopas (with an

in Greek) could well have been one of ‘the other women’ Luke says were at the tomb, and been the one going home with Cleopas (eo) that afternoon. Even if not, she was at least one of the group.

Imagine you are Mary – or Cleopas – how do you feel as you walk home that afternoon? Was it an easy journey? When that stranger joins you, how does the conversation go? How polite and tactful are the men being? (If A.N.Other was another man, why would they have been arguing?)

Why should Jesus have wanted to meet and talk to them, before going and talking to the other disciples?

Whose needs are he fulfilling?

Why do today’s Christians know so little about the Old Testament?

How could it have been so different when they reached Emmaus? And does this say anything to us?

Who was the next person Jesus appeared to? Can we think why?

Week 3. May 6th. “Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son”.

We are still with Luke, but back in Jerusalem, with not only the Eleven, but the whole crowd of Jesus’ followers, men and women. As they share their news, Jesus is there with them.

Read Luke 24. 33-49.

He gives them all the proofs they need.

How do you as Mary (or Cleopas!) feel now?

Which of the disciples’ needs has Jesus now met for them?

What instructions has he given them?

What promise has he given them?

What can we do or say to those around us to convince them that Jesus really has risen?

Week 4. May 13th. “Jesus Christ is risen today! Alleluia!”

This is the account of Our Lord’s resurrection appearance we are probably most familiar with. John is using a different source for his story. As the gospel itself claims, it is his own experience he is describing. It is certainly more detailed than the others, and it concentrates on Mary Magdalen’s actions

and encounters. As you read it, imagine you are the people involved: how did you feel?

Read Jn. 20. 1-18.

Is there anything particular you have noticed this time reading the story at your own speed?

Why did Mary go back to the tomb?

Why did the angels ask her why she was weeping? (now two of them)

Here's a question I bet on-one has ever asked you before – what could it have been like for Jesus to find himself alive again, more alive than ever? How was he going to sort himself out? Don't forget Jesus is still human as well as divine.

So why did he appear to Mary at that time?

Read Jn. 20. 19-23.

John doesn't repeat Luke's story of the pair from Emmaus, just Jesus, now it seems fully aware of himself, giving his male disciples all the proof of his resurrection they need.

What job does he give them? What support does he give them?

Read Jn. 20. 24-29.

Why was Thomas Didymus not with the others that evening? What do we know about him to suggest where he might have been?

The ten disciples now found they were being told "I don't believe you. You are talking rubbish". Why might he have been so emphatic in his denial? But Jesus wanted Thomas in his team, and gave him the same proofs he had given the others, and Thomas responded magnificently, more than all the rest. How can we be sure the resurrection is true?

Week 5. May 20th. "Alleluia! Give thanks to the risen Lord!"

The last verses of Jn. 20 seem to round off the story. John says he has chosen the incidents he has recorded to give us full grounds for belief. But in chapter 21 we have an epilogue, a chance to pick up stray ends, to show where things were to go on from there, and to sort out a misunderstanding that had arisen in the early days of the church.

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus had told the disciples to go to Galilee, so here John shows us seven of them, the inner circle, in Galilee, at a bit of a loose end, and deciding with Simon Peter to go fishing.

Read Jn 21. 1-14

Another miraculous catch, like in Luke's gospel, to remind us of the Lord's promise to make them fishers of people? 153 – the supposed number of the nations of the then world?

This time Jesus feeds them, on fish, but they have to supply some of the fish.

Seven disciples, and Thomas was with them, and three appearances recorded – are these numbers possibly symbolic in any way?

Read Jn. 21. 15-19.

Here we have a job interview! This is all very formal; Jesus addresses Peter by his full name, Simon Johnson, but then asks him "Do you love me?", using the deepest word for love 'agapas me?' and adds "More than these others". Peter answered using the more general word for love "Philo". What previous claim had he made that he must have been thinking of? Jesus accepted this lesser love, and gave Peter a job. But he asked again "Agapas me?" Again Peter replied "Philo", and had the job increased. A third time Jesus asked this time using Peter's own word – "So you do care a bit then?" was the implication. Poor Peter; he daren't claim to love the Lord as much as Jesus loves him but Jesus accepted the love he had to offer, and the job was his. The only specification for serving the Lord is to love as much as we are able. I find that very encouraging. But we have to go on praying for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so we may love perfectly, and worthily magnify the Lord's name. We also have to become aware of what the cost will be.

Why did Jesus want his followers to go back to Galilee? To start all over again, with a new faith, a new commitment, a new life? Do we need sometimes to go back to start again and renew our love for Christ and our work for his kingdom?

After this Easter lockdown, what about the life of the church – will we need to go back to basics to build up the church when things get back to normal ? If they ever do! What is normal? What is basic? There is a lot of praying and thinking to be done ahead.

Ann Johnson April, 2020.