

**While it was Still Dark**  
Easter Morning

21 April, 2019

Reading: John 20:1-9

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary came to the tomb.  
**While it was still dark.**

The most fun you can have at Youth Group is playing Spotlight. The rules are pretty simple. You wait till it's really dark then one person has the torch and they stand in a prominent position. The players go off into the distance and the light bearer counts to 30 in aloud voice. While they are counting the others run to the light then the torch bearer turns and tries to spot the other players. If your name gets called out you have to stand down till the next round. The winner is the one who gets to the light first without being spotted. We used to play it a lot when I was youth group leader. To be honest things got pretty competitive and there wasn't a lot of health or, indeed, safety. We had to stand down one boy who broke his nose. With blood pouring out of his nose he gurgled, "I don't want to stop."

John's account of the resurrection of Jesus is like Spotlight. While it is still dark Mary becomes the light bearer. You can tell John didn't make this story up, because no first century man would believe the story of a woman. Of course things have changed! Mary holds the light. The others come running. Peter is getting old and the other younger disciple gets there first.

John's approach is to show that the resurrection is a great light breaking in upon the dark world. He constantly plays darkness with light throughout his Gospel.

It is the constant experience of the people of God that while it is still dark we find that God is working on our behalf even if we do not recognise it at the time. He is working to bring light and to dispel our dark situations. The good news is not only that Jesus was raised from the tomb but that the character of God is revealed in Jesus. He is Light and He also is Love.

It felt to me like great darkness descended on our city on March 15th. Not just the terrible shootings that caused death and suffering but also the death of our image of ourselves - a safe place at the end of the world. And nobody was more shocked than the media who constantly run stories that religion and belief in God is dead in our society. They were shocked to find that people do pray in our city and they do take their faith seriously. Let's be honest they had almost convinced us too.

After the shootings many said love is stronger than death or they said that light overcomes darkness. We know because of Easter morning that this is not just wishful thinking.

Love IS stronger than all kinds of death. Lee Strobel like so many before him set himself the task of disproving the resurrection. A Harvard trained lawyer and a reporter for the New York times, he carefully researched all the evidence. He looked at the evidence of the empty tomb, the grave clothes, the reaction of the disciples, all the gospel accounts even the forensic evidence. In the end he had what he called a conversion of the intellect. Like Sherlock Holmes, once he had eliminated all the other possibilities only one remained, Jesus did rise from the dead. But what is more interesting is that over this time he found a change coming over his life. He had been a pretty work obsessed father and husband, absent from his family and marriage but the more he entered into the possibility of the risen Christ the more he found himself becoming a better person. One day it came to a head when he overheard his young daughter Alison talking to his wife, “Mummy,” she said, “Why has daddy become a better daddy?”

If the events of 2000 years ago were just in the history books we wouldn't be here today. Rather we believe that Christ is alive still and changing people's lives for the better. We believe that while it is still dark in our world, Jesus brings light. We believe that while there's still hate in our world, Jesus brings love. We believe that while there is still despair Jesus brings hope.

Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu was a symbol of hope in the midst of apartheid South Africa. Against all odds the Bishop wrote this prayer:

Victory is Ours

Goodness is stronger than evil;  
Love is stronger than hate;  
Light is stronger than darkness;  
Life is stronger than death;  
Victory is ours through Him who loves us.

We sing these words at the family service as a hymn. My prayer is that you might know the truth of these words in your life this Easter and know that while it is still dark Jesus brings us light.