

I constantly have a thing with our Nathan when he is particularly picky about his food. He says he's doesn't like certain things, but a bit like me at that age, I hadn't actually tried certain foods to know whether I liked it or not. Things like cabbage – I never touched the stuff when I was young because it looked weird, but now that I have tried it, it's actually really nice.

But then there's those things that I have tried and I just don't like them. We probably all can think of something that we just don't like. We have weighed up our opinion and come to the conclusion that it's just not for us. I call them our marmite moments. And actually marmite is one of those for me. I just don't like it. The other one for me is coffee. I've tried it, I've had it really milky, but it's just not my thing.

So we have marmite moments in life – where we make an opinion on something and that's it, we've made up our mind. But it doesn't affect anyone else's opinion. I can't say that coffee tastes awful to everyone when for others they love it.

The other moments that we can categorise in life are what I consider as my binary moments. I come from an IT background, so I'm so used to dealing with things that are either true or false, 1's and 0's, there's no in between. There's no opinion. It's either one or the other. And for family in my house, my binary way of living can be very annoying. There's no grey.

So it's either binary or it's marmite. It's either a fact, or it's an opinion.

At this Easter time which is so much more strange than it has ever been before, the issue of the Resurrection still sits for many people as a marmite moment. It might

be true for you Jonny, but it's not true for me, and my opinion is as valid as yours.

But our reading from John's Gospel, is telling us that the very basis for the Christian message – the story of the Resurrection – is not a marmite moment, it's very much binary. There's nothing in those verses today that can be opinion.

Let's have a look at the reading again.

Verse 1. *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.*

Mary **SAW**. So that's not marmite. That's binary. It's not that she assumes or has an opinion. She saw. Fact.

And it's as a result of that fact, that she assumes an act of robbery has taken place. It's always foolish to act on something that you don't already know the facts about – it can get you into a lot of bother.

So she runs to Simon-Peter and John, and says "*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have put him.*"

None of this is hear-say. Because if it was, then why the mad dash by Peter and John to the tomb? They're not out for a dander to find out what's going on – it's a race to the tomb, and John is obviously a better sprinter than Peter.

Then verse 5 says that 'John bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there'. Then Peter goes right into the tomb and it says 'he saw the strips of linen lying there'

When it comes to serious incidents involving the police, witnesses are called based not on what they think might have happened, but in particular based on what they saw happen. No Court of Law will ever conclude a case based on hear-say. It has to be facts. This is all facts that we are collecting here in this story.

We wouldn't expect John to turn to Peter and say something like, "John, you may think this is an empty tomb with grave clothes lying there, but that's your opinion". The facts are there to see.

And so society today needs to read the story and do its own investigating. You might ask, why Jonny do I need to know this if I'm a Christian? Well actually if you don't mind, my hope this morning is that this message is shared widely, in particular with those who are cynical of the Easter Message, of those that say 'rising from the dead? – what a load of nonsense'. We might think today that things are so disappointing not having a gathering here or in our churches, but actually the power of the internet today means that this message can get further than my talk in front of a hundred people. So as Christian's I want you to take this Easter Message today and pass it, share it, facebook it, tweet it, on to as many people as possible, so they all get the chance to consider this story for themselves. Give them the opportunity to see the facts over their opinion. This folks is the hope of Easter today in 2020.

Let's have a think at that image at the tomb. What are the options?

i) The body could have been taken by Grave Robbers

I can remember when the trailer was stolen from the side of our house, and the incredible thing about that, was it happened while we were sleeping. But even more incredible, was that those that stole it took time to remove the contents of the trailer which I was hoping the following day to take to the dump – but they cleared it and left the contents in my drive, because the thing of value to them was actually the trailer.

So let's look at the tomb. Why would grave robbers take a body – especially this one, and why would they unwrap the linen around the body and leave that behind. That's like my friends who stole the trailer, leaving the trailer behind and taking the contents. It doesn't make any sense. The linen was valuable. The body wasn't.

So let's think through another opinion.

ii) Let's consider that maybe the Romans or Jewish authorities stole the body.

Again, why would they do it? They had actually put guards on the entrance to the tomb so that no one would steal Jesus' body, and now they steal it? And then when everyone around Jerusalem is wanting to know where the body is, they could have said something, but they didn't. Again, it doesn't make sense.

iii) So maybe the Christians stole the body

Maybe they wanted to use the empty tomb to create a new movement they knew now to actually be false. But if they knew it to be false, that Jesus was actually dead and that this whole movement that he created is about to come crashing down around them as the Jews rise up against Christianity, why would this "lie" transform them from demoralised cowards who are hiding in their

homes and now become such a motivated, enthusiastic family that embraced poverty, powerlessness, beatings, verbal and physical abuse, all manner of persecution and martyrdom. Why would they endure such torture for something they knew wasn't true? It just doesn't make sense.

So folks this isn't about opinion. The fact is that Jesus rose from the grave. In fact he appeared to over 500 followers, and then he empowers them to grow his Church. And now 2,000 years on it's still growing. Today we are on the site of Christian worship that has been in existence for 1500 years. That's not opinion.

The reality is this. The facts stack up for themselves. The options don't weigh up. But it's not about me convincing you today. The facts are what they are. It's whether you want that incredible hope to be the springboard for your life. And lets face it, with the reality of what is happening around us right now, tell me what you have got to lose in it?

You see that's what John does here. v8, it says that John "*saw and believed.*" John saw the reality of the situation. His opinion was entirely based on the facts. And what were the facts? The facts were that John saw the grave clothes neatly wrapped.

Why would a grave robber do this? Which grave robber tidies up after themselves?

John saw the neatly folded clothes and the penny dropped and he realised that Jesus' death was not the end. He saw and believed. And soon after he got to meet the risen Jesus for himself.

So what do these facts, not opinions, of the resurrection mean for you?

Firstly, it proves that Jesus' claims all along were true. All the prophecies of hundreds of years were leading up to this very point, and Jesus didn't disappoint. So he was either completely mad but an utter genius, or he was God.

Second, because of this fact, it declares that death shouldn't be something we fear. We should only fear it if we don't believe that the resurrection is something we want to accept. Because then death is death, and that's the end of your life. People say farewell to loved ones, and never see them again. Sorry to be so binary. But is that all life is about?

I'd really challenge any of you that are watching now and haven't truly made that call on your life, to follow Jesus, to take the time to explore. And let's face it we all have the time at present, to mull over the evidence, but then I'd encourage you do something about it.

So here's the options.

Today trust Christ. Recognise the reality of what he did on that first Easter morning for all of us, breaking any power of death that we see around us right now (over 6,000 deaths to date in the UK from one virus alone), giving us hope beyond the grave, something that is so needed right now. And we know that hope to be ours because Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die".

So that's the action I would love you to take.

But maybe the action you want to take first is to delve deeper – investigate the facts. And if that is you, then I would encourage you to look into Alpha. We run it every year in our church. Contact me and I'm happy to have a chat over the phone about it.

Easter Sunday 2020 may be a day that many will forget about in the weeks ahead as sad stories of sick people flood the News. But I hope and pray that the Good News of Easter Sunday 2020 is actually the day that you give your life to Jesus, based not on the opinion of others, but based on the facts that are in front of you in this book.

I'm going to pray a prayer of commitment as I finish that I'd ask you to pray with me if you're willing, and if you do please get in touch and let me know so that we can give you material to help you on this new journey.