

## Easter 2016

### The Greatest Story Ever Told

We have five Rock shapes with words on one side and letters on the other.

*Betrayed* - The religious leaders wanted rid of Jesus and the opportunity came when Judas, one of Jesus' friends, came and said he would tell them where and when to arrest Him if they gave him money; for 30 silver coins, Judas betrayed Jesus and took the crowd to place where Jesus was.

*Arrested* - the crowd and the soldiers took Jesus away; they arrested Him and asked Him lots of questions; most of time He said nothing. For His friends it all seemed lost, this was the end of the story; how could Jesus be God's Saviour if He was arrested and in prison?

*Crucified* - Maybe it was all a mistake; maybe the soldiers and Pilate, the governor, would let Jesus go; once they realised that He was innocent, that He had done nothing wrong, He would be released. But no! People told lies about Him and Jesus was crucified alongside two thieves.

*Buried* - Jesus had died! There was no doubt about it and they took His body down from the cross and buried it in a tomb carved out of rock; they took a large stone and rolled it over the mouth of the cave so that nobody could steal His body.

*Hopeless* - Everything seemed hopeless. On the Sunday morning the women came to the tomb, their hearts heavy and sad, because Jesus had died and they came to cover His dead body with perfume and oils; everything was hopeless!

These women came to tomb and the stone was rolled away; the last thing they expected was to find the tomb empty; there was nobody there! They didn't know what to think to start with but then the angel told them that Jesus was ... *turn the stones over to spell RISEN*. Jesus is alive - that is the whole message of Easter; Jesus is alive and Jesus is still with us by His Spirit; no situation is hopeless now! No matter how dark and hopeless things might seem, because Jesus is alive & because Jesus is with us nothing is totally hopeless. He is always with us to love and care for us; He is always there to save us.

## Easter's Five senses

### I found something this week that showed how all five senses are involved in the Easter story

*Taste:* with some salt water in bowl, dip your finger and taste; how does it taste? Do we know something that tastes salty? *Tears.* We cry when we're sad and tears run down our faces if we cry enough. The women at the start of Easter Sunday were sad and some of them were crying and tears would be running down their faces, to taste salty.

*Touch:* the stone - how does it feel? Rough; I've only a small stone; the women were expecting to have to touch the stone, to roll the stone away from the tomb, but when they got there it had already been done! The stone was rolled back and so they didn't have to touch it. Later they touched Jesus' body and knew it was real.

*Smell:* Perfume - do you like the smell? The women would have something like this with them on the Sunday morning; they were going to cover Jesus' body with these smelly perfumes to make it smell nice and to stop it from smelling awful.

*Sight:* what did they see? The tomb was empty; there was nothing there except white cloths; they saw that Jesus wasn't there; then later they saw Him with their own eyes; Mary saw Him in the garden; the disciples saw Him in their room, twice! People saw Him time and time again - Jesus is standing up, moving, doing things, alive.

*Hearing:* what did they hear? They heard the angels tell them that Jesus is risen; they heard one another say "We've seen the Lord!" Because of what they had seen and heard, they began to believe that Jesus is alive, that it was all true. Christians ever since have told this extraordinary story that Jesus who died was raised from the dead and is Saviour of the world.

#### **Prayer:**

Thank you Lord for the taste of the tears, tears that changed to smiles, because Jesus is alive.

Thank you for the smell of the perfumes, perfumes that were not needed, because Jesus is alive.

Thank you Lord for what they saw, that the cave was empty because Jesus is alive.

Thank you Lord for when they touched their faces to the ground, because Jesus is alive.

Thank you, Lord that they heard the best news of their lives because Jesus is alive.

Thank you, Lord, that we can sing and dance and shout and laugh because Jesus is alive.

## A New start?

Imagine a blank canvas, ready to have a piece of art painted on it! Do you ever wish that your life was like that blank canvas, a chance to start over? Not everything has gone to plan; we've made some ropey choices in life. We've got regrets; there are things, given a second chance, that we'd not do. There is someone right in the middle of Easter for whom that is totally true, who is full of regrets and really doesn't know if he's going to get a second chance. He is Peter.

It all started in the small hours of Thursday night/Friday morning. Jesus had spoken about trouble ahead and Peter (along with the others to be fair) had said "I'll never leave you; I'll stand by you, no matter what!" But then Jesus had been arrested and Peter (and all the others) had run away. Peter had gone back! He had followed Jesus and the soldiers at a distance; let's see what's going to happen. As Peter watched, standing by the fire to keep warm, someone said to him "You're a friend of Jesus, aren't you?" He's put on the spot; what is he to say? So he blusters out "Who? Me? No!" It happens a second time and a third time: "you're from Galilee; you're a friend of this Jesus!" Three times in all Peter denies knowing Jesus; "I don't know the man" he virtually shouts to the people accusing him. He's frightened that the same fate that has befallen Jesus will befall Peter too. So he denies it; he runs away. He feels ashamed. Be honest; we've been there, maybe not denying our faith, but there are things we regret, that we wish we never had done; we wish we could get the chance over again and we'd do it differently!

After Easter, there are still things to sort. Peter and some of his friends go fishing. In the early morning light, a man on the shore tells them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat; they take a huge catch. It's Jesus. They have breakfast on beach and then a conversation on their own. We have just read some of it. "*Peter, do you love me?*" Three times Jesus asks the question and three times Peter says "*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*" Three times Jesus calls Peter to be the leader of the disciples' group. It is a new start for Peter; his relationship with Jesus is mended and Jesus forgives Peter his mistakes; the past is past as far as Jesus is concerned; Peter has made mistakes, but these are past; they can't be undone, but Jesus treats Peter as if they had never happened - forgiveness. Now Peter has a new start in life; he has a chance to start over again and to be a new person. Two months later, Peter is standing in the centre of the city telling anyone who will listen that Jesus is Lord! He has a new and living hope because Jesus is risen, wrote Peter later.

A new start? Jesus died that we might be forgiven; He rose again to show that it works. Easter is about Jesus making us new people: people with a new passion in our hearts, to love the Lord with an undying love, people with a new desire to love and serve the Lord; people with hearts to love other people and to care and serve. Easter was a new start for Jesus after His death on cross, a new start possible because the power of God went to work to raise Him; death is defeated. The same power is at work in us to make us new people and to help us live our lives in Jesus' ways, the fear of death is defeated. We deal with lots of things that life has thrown at us; we've made some ropey choices in the past; not everything has gone to plan; there are regrets. Easter is about new beginnings: "*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new is come.*" (2 Corinthians 5:17) Peter was a new man in the grace that Jesus showed him; we are no different from Peter in both ways: we've made mistakes, things we regret; but Jesus loves us, forgives us, promises to help us and to be with us, He offers us a new start in life. Is there a blank canvas? Is there a new work of art to be created? Is that you? Anything is possible because of Easter.