

On Easter Day, after the challenges and horrors of Holy Week, we suddenly find ourselves dealing with a disturbing disappearance. The women who went down to the tomb that morning expected to be faced with the ugliness and finality of death. They went right into the tomb, searching for the dead in the place of death. And when they emerged, they were faced instead with two men in dazzling clothes, saying “why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen.”

For all the joy of the occasion, this is oddly disorientating. In the 1965 classic film, *The Sound of Music*, Maria, played by Julie Andrews of course, goes missing from the nunnery yet again. And when one of the sisters in despair, says, “I have looked everywhere, in all the usual places”, she is sharply instructed by the mother superior to stop looking in the usual places, and start looking somewhere unexpected for the elusive would-be nun.

Up until now, for all the terrible events, at least we always knew where Jesus was. He was in a garden, praying. He was in court. He was nailed to a tree. He was in a tomb. The object of our devotions, our betrayals, our loss, was always somewhere we could see him and find him if we chose. But this morning, something has changed. Sorrow has given way to rejoicing at the news that he is risen. But in that same moment, Jesus suddenly becomes elusive.

He is not in the tomb, but nor is he to be found in any of his familiar haunts. He is not even readily identifiable by those closest to him when they do meet him: in St John’s gospel Mary at first mistakes him for the gardener, and later the disciples out finishing do not recognise Jesus giving them advice from the shore. In the long walk to Emmaus it takes until the evening meal before the other disciples recognise him as he breaks bread. And the best the angels can do is, *Sound of Music* style, to suggest the disciples look in some unexpected place.

And the same is surely true for us. Last night at our Easter Vigil, we entered the tomb-like darkness of this cathedral. But what we found was not a body. The fire was lit. In deep darkness, “He is dead” gave way to “he is risen”. Today, the cathedral is flooded with light, and we know the good news to be true. Our hurt, our brokenness, is left behind as the darkness disperses and the light floods in. This is good news – news to share with all the world. But even in our rejoicing, we hear the words of the angels: “He is not here. He is risen”.

And like the first disciples that morning, we have a challenge on our hands. Freed from the constraints of the tomb and presumably in no urgent hurry to be confined by any other structures, including the church, the risen Jesus will go where he will. Like Maria, of *Sound of Music* fame, gleefully free and singing her joy while the religious get on with being religious, he is not here. And we have to dare to turn our backs on all that constrains our faith and our love, and look for him elsewhere and everywhere.

If we are serious about seeking him, we must go out from the cathedral at the end of this service, expectant and ready to be surprised. We must look for him on the streets of Portsmouth, amongst people who are experiencing hard times; or seek him in our homes and our places of work, recognising him in those close to us and in strangers, in the familiar where we do not anticipate renewal as much as in extraordinary circumstances, allowing him to transform all our lives for the good.

Here in our cathedral and churches we come, especially on Easter Day but on any day, to learn afresh or again the signs and signals of Jesus' presence. We read Scripture and pray together; we encounter Christ as we break the bread. This is where we become ever more attuned to the hallmarks of Jesus' presence, so that wherever we meet him we recognise him and celebrate. And we keep alive his birth, life, death and resurrection as we pray through the cycle of the year. But if you sense that you are not meeting Jesus in the usual places – if familiar prayer patterns become dull or you no longer find him in activities that once inspired - take some advice from Maria's mother superior – look for Jesus where you don't expect him.