**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

I have a book on my bookshelves - which I have read: it is called Wrestling with Angels, and is by Rowan Williams. However, I also have one on my shelf called The complete idiot’s guide to angels, only small parts of which I have read. Perhaps, after today’s gospel reading, I should make more effort to read the rest.

In these days when we are all receiving deliveries – whether from supermarket delivery people or from friends, neighbours and others – we are getting very used to having whatever it is put on the doorstep and then they ring the bell and stand back. People are very focused – most of them – on doing the necessary and then moving on. They aren’t there to chat about the weather or the traffic or even how many more drops they have to make before they can stop. Brisk and business-like.

And actually that pretty well sums up angels. The Greek word angelos means messenger. And the angel in this gospel story this morning is very like a delivery driver: he is delivering something with no frills attached. All the angels in Matthew’s gospel do exactly what it says on the tin: they deliver their message and go. Job done.

It is then the task of whoever receives the delivery to take the message inside, open it and use it.

I have said before that the most frequently used phrase in the Bible is do not be afraid. I haven’t actually counted them personally, but if I believe what I read, there is one ‘do not be afraid’ for every day of the year. Not counting Leap Years.

‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, your wife Elizabeth will bear a son and you will name him John.’

‘Do not be afraid, Mary.’

‘Do not be afraid, shepherds. I bring you good news of great joy that shall be to all people.’

‘Do not be afraid, Joseph, to take Mary as your wife.

Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.

This angel in today’s gospel says that to the women. Though not before he has made an entrance with attitude: he is wearing dazzling robes; he arrives heralded by the earthquake; he nonchalantly rolls this huge stone away from the entrance to the tomb and gives the guards such a shock that they instantly faint …. Then he sits down on the stone, metaphorically at least brushing off his hands and folding his arms.

And for his final trick, he turns to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (who is probably the mother of Jesus) and says: Do not be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has been raised, *as he said*.

That ‘as he said’ is important. Three times in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus tried to tell the disciples what was going to happen – to deliver his good news. And three times the disciples refused to accept the delivery. So Matthew’s angel is doing the ‘told you so’ bit.

And we—like the women here, the two Marys—despite the combined evidence of our Scripture, our traditions, and our own reasoning - still come to so many situations looking for what is dead, even when we have been promised that life is what was on order. Because life has so often beaten us down maybe. Things don’t always turn out as we hoped. People or circumstances sometimes seem to be against us.

And maybe that is why we only hear the first half of Jesus' promise: ‘The Son of Man will suffer and be killed...’ but forget what comes next …

Now, as much as at any time in the past, we are braced for bad news: for illness and even death. We are, some more than others, also struggling with a sense of isolation and of vague foreboding. And we look at an uncertain future, not knowing when anything approaching normality might return.

But while all that is true, the angel/messenger/delivery driver has still done his or her job. Brought the Good News to our door. We don’t even have to sign for it – just as well in the current climate. … There are no strings attached, as it were.

However, it doesn’t end there. The parcel is handed over, but we still have to open it and there are still operating instructions: Come and see. Go and tell.

So off the two Marys went – having come to see for themselves and now clearly with the intention of going to tell the disciples.

I’ve only it had happen once, that I ordered something - a couple of Christmases ago - and the company was clearly so overworked and disorganised that they sent two of it in two separate deliveries.

Here’s the second one – it’s that sort of chaotic and confused and confusing day: the women are joyful, but, we are told, still fearful as they run off to find the disciples, and then, blow me if Jesus himself doesn’t turn up.

Same good news, same delivery: don’t be afraid, come and see – and they grabbed him by the feet to be sure he was real – and then go and tell.

As is the way with these stories; as is the way with how we read the Bible – what are we supposed to learn about God and about how to live?

Not to be afraid. To expect a delivery of Good News because that is what is promised to us. To come and see for ourselves. Think it through, read the Bible, try praying.

And having come and seen, it is then our job to go and tell. It is a giant game of Pass the Parcel. By how we live, by our servanthood, by our love for others.

He is not here. He is risen. Alleluia!

**Amen**