

The Patterson family, residents of Trotter Street, were building their own extension, and, with the help of their neighbours, had just finished digging the foundations. The next morning, Dad was exhausted.

Read extract from *The Big Concrete Lorry*, by Shirley Hughes.

That was from the *Big Concrete Lorry*, a wonderful book by Shirley Hughes who died earlier this year.

There are many times in our lives when things don't go quite as we expect – sometimes that can be a good thing, sometimes, not so, and sometimes, like with the Pattersons, despite an unexpected turn of events, things can all turn out OK in the end.

But how we react to these surprises in our lives says a lot about each and every one of us, as individuals. Looking at the story of the resurrection of Jesus on this Easter day, it is interesting to see how different people reacted, and so let's look at Mary Magdalene, Peter and the man described as the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, often called the beloved disciple.

So first to Mary Magdalene. In John's version of the story she is the only one of the women present; one of the women who had been working together to prepare spices and ointments for the treatment of the body. It is Mary that gets the first surprise. The stone, a massive stone covering the tomb, had been moved. We don't know how it was moved – but the tomb was now open. And as she was alone, she ran for help. Very sensible. Investigating an open tomb is not something anyone would choose to do by themselves.

Then, having been told what had happened by Mary, Peter and the beloved disciple have their surprise and they run to the tomb to see what has happened. The beloved disciple got there first, but didn't go in! Again, he probably didn't want to do anything alone, so waited for Peter. Peter arrived, went in and saw things had been moved, but it appears that it was the beloved disciple who worked out what had happened.

And then they went home, presumably to meet up with, and tell, the other disciples – to share the surprise perhaps. But Mary Magdalene stayed behind and then met the risen Jesus. Talk about surprises!

So three very different reactions to what would have been a huge surprise.

Mary Magdalene discovered that something had happened, and went to the senior disciples for help, and then returned to see what needed doing, perhaps expecting something else – which happened!

Peter went into the tomb to have a look but didn't understand, and went home.

The beloved disciple went in after Peter, and understood, and explained.

I wonder how any of us would have reacted if we had been there on that first day of the week all those years ago? We all react to surprises in very different ways. Some of us are probably quite impetuous and instantly want to do something, to sort it out. That's probably most of the men here! Some of us can be quite calm and are prepared to take a moment or two and

consider what is the best thing to do and at the right moment they do what they think is best. Sometimes, like the Pattersons on Trotter Street, we have no choice and simply have to get on with it.

That first Easter Day was certainly a day of surprises, but then I don't know about you but I find my journey of faith frequently a journey of surprises. God calls each and every one of us in a different way to do different things – but those differences don't make any of us more or less important to God.

On that first Easter Day our three characters had very different roles. Mary Magdalene, a woman – and never forget that God chose a woman to be the first person to meet the risen Lord which was just so counter cultural, was there to continue to care for Jesus, now the risen Lord. Peter, the leader, was there to take action, to investigate what had happened. And the beloved disciple was there to explain what had happened.

Different people will have different views on all sorts of things to do with our faith particularly when it all started. But for me, Easter Day is when Christianity was born. This is the most important day of the year. Christmas is when we remember Jesus being born – clearly a major beginning and the first surprise as the birth of Jesus was hardly usual; Pentecost is when we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit – another key beginning as without the strength given to us from God through the Holy Spirit we cannot do anything – and another big surprise when it arrived – the appearance of flames, making the disciples sound drunk first thing in the morning, and Peter's amazing first sermon resulting in 3,000 people being added to Jesus' followers; but Easter is the key – without the death and resurrection (the biggest surprise) of Jesus there cannot be universal forgiveness for those who ask, there cannot be eternal life, our faith would be worthless. As the last verse of the song we listened to said:

And the Church of Christ was born
Then the Spirit lit the flame
Now this gospel truth of old
Shall not kneel shall not faint

By His blood and in His Name
In His freedom I am free
For the love of Jesus Christ
Who has resurrected me

Each of us may see things differently – and that is absolutely fine. Each of us has our own faith story, and to help me say a little bit about mine will you indulge me for a moment whilst I talk about these things that as a priest I wear. They are called stoles and we have four of them. Some people chose to have plain stoles of each colour, but for me I wanted them to speak about my faith. So I have brought all four today. What I wanted was a set of stoles which would ground my faith – protect me from surprises perhaps.

This one, the white stole, we wear primarily at Christmas and Easter, but it was also the stole I wore at my ordination services. It has an image of Christmas – the crib on one side and the Resurrection – the cross with the addition of new life from the daffodils on the other. And this shows for me the life of Christ on this earth. Being ordained wearing a stole representing Christ's life on earth was very special.

The green stole, the one you will see most often as it is the one we wear during what is called ordinary time which is something like two thirds of the year, shows a journey towards a rainbow – and that is to represent our journeys of faith. Yes mine goes through the countryside as that is where I love to be, but it is the journey to heaven represented by the rainbow which is important. Each of our journeys is different – what is important is being on that journey.

We then have purple – for times of preparation – Lent and Advent. Times when we are preparing ourselves for what is to come. So I have candles to focus my thoughts and to help me to see where we are going. Times of preparation are often very challenging as the busyness of life doesn't go away. All we can do is our best.

And finally red, seen the least often, on the feast of Pentecost and during some of Holy week – and for this I have the flames seen at the coming of the Holy Spirit.

And on each of my stoles, in the same place, you will see a dove, representing the peace and protection brought to me by the Holy Spirit, without which I can do none of this. So my stoles are there to support me in my faith, particularly when I lead God's people in worship.

So today, on this Easter Sunday, when we have been looking at all sorts of surprises, I encourage you to think about your faith and how the resurrection of our Lord Jesus gives you the strength to live out that faith and survive those surprises.

You won't have stoles to help you when surprises hit you, but perhaps you may have something special that helps you at those times – it may be a cross, it may be a picture, it may be a special bible or a special place to just sit and pray. But I do encourage you, as a means of protecting your faith against surprises, to have something ready.

In our gospel reading, Mary Magdalene was hit by a huge surprise, and after Peter and the beloved disciple had left, Mary hung around and met her Lord. When she realised that the man she had mistaken for the gardener was the man who first thing that morning she had come to look after his dead body, and he was alive, her deep sadness turned into overwhelming joy. That's the sort of surprise that we like. That is the sort of surprise that when we encounter Jesus we should expect. That overwhelming joy is what our faith should be about.

Amen.