

Sermon

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Easter Day. A day we would normally celebrate with Alleluias and Easter Eggs and family gatherings. In Church, with great ceremony we light the Easter Candle and the candle is processed through the Church. The whole Church is bathed in the light. The light that came into the world and which not even death can extinguish. This is a day when our hearts burst with joy – because... Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed Alleluia.

I can see that glorious and most beautiful procession in my mind – and have so looked forward to this day – Easter Day – so that we can once again remind ourselves and celebrate that the son of God conquered death, is alive and lives amongst us.

Today our resurrection account comes from John's gospel – my favourite of the four Gospels. It is such a dramatic account of the events of that glorious first Easter morning and it takes us to the very heart of the Gospel message – that Jesus was crucified and has conquered death and that a new creation has begun – Jesus lives Alleluia.

Whilst all the Gospel accounts vary to some degree about the events of that morning, they all agree that it is Mary Magdalene who is the first to go to the tomb. In John's account we feel the agony of Mary Magdalene as she puts her own grief to one side in

order to tend the body of her beloved friend and teacher.

We aren't told in our reading whether Mary Magdalene entered the tomb or not, we only know that she saw that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb and that she fled in order to alert the other disciples – and when they came they entered and found that Jesus body had gone. Did Mary presume that Jesus body had gone – that someone had entered the tomb and stolen Jesus body. Did she jump to conclusions – as we perhaps so often do about God's actions in our lives. Whether she presumed or not, she was right, Jesus body wasn't there.

As the story moves on, more disciples turn up including “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. Over centuries there have been many suggestions and ideas as to whom this disciple might be. I would like to think that this disciple isn't named because they are there to represent you or me. And that puts us, as ordinary people, at the very heart of this extraordinary account. It makes it personal and it makes it real, it makes it meaningful to us today as we read the account and try to comprehend the magnitude of these events.

In our gospel reading we get a sense of urgency at the scene – Mary ran to those whom she trusted, the disciples ran towards the tomb to determine what had happened. And so probably with his heart pumping from running and fear, Peter enters the tomb and discovers it is, indeed, empty. And then we get such detail about the cloths which bound Jesus

and how they are carefully placed and in the case of the covering which had been on Jesus head - that was carefully rolled and left on its own in the tomb.

The tomb is empty – no angel, no heavenly messenger. And we are told that the disciple whom Jesus loved “saw and believed”. What did he believe? Did he believe that Mary was correct – that Jesus body had been stolen, or did he believe what Jesus had said the night of their last meal together, that Jesus had indeed "conquered the world!"

These two disciples go home. There are no shouts of joy, no celebration. The emptiness of the tomb has not, as yet, made a difference. Isn't it the same in our communities to some extent – a lack of understanding at the enormity of what has happened – at what this means for us as Christians.

Mary Magdalene is left alone, standing weeping outside of the tomb but she finds the courage to enter it. And the tomb which the other disciples found empty is not empty at all. Whilst the body of Jesus is not there, there are two angels. “Why are you weeping?” they ask her. Mary's response – she tells the angels why - because they have taken away her Lord. Finally, Mary repeats the question once again to a man she believes is the gardener. But the moment he speaks her name, she is in no doubt that it is Jesus – Rabbouni, her Teacher.

This passage of scripture gives us so much – it links the end of John's Gospel to it's beginning. In the

opening of John's gospel Jesus asks the disciples of John the Baptist "What are you looking for?" and here towards the end of the gospel, Jesus asks Mary "Whom are you looking for?".

So we can link the heralding of Jesus first ministry with a new beginning. A new life in Christ. Jesus death is not the end of the story – it's a new beginning.

Remember too – at the beginning of John's Gospel is the absence of light. John took us to the creation story – "In the beginning ..." and it goes on .. "What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it".

Remember the link between the opening of John's gospel and the Genesis story – the very beginning. "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep".

There are echoes too of St Paul's declarations – I'm thinking of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. The declaration of a new creation – "everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new".

In our story today, we are in a garden and Mary thinks Jesus is the gardener – and so he is – bringing a new world, a new life and a new creation into being. Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden – in our story today, Mary is sent out of the garden rejoicing – she is sent to tell everyone that the darkness has not overcome the Word made flesh.

Our story today holds so much - fear, courage, hope and joy.

Our lives today are not what we hoped for or anticipated on Easter Day. We live in unprecedented times – when many are sacrificing so much for the common good – whether putting themselves at risk to care for others, giving up our freedom in order to keep ourselves and others safe, whatever the sacrifice – we live with those emotions that are contained in our gospel story. Fear, courage and hope. But we have joy too – there is joy in the Easter message and there is an invitation.

Easter Day is about unlikely, surprising events which deliver to us the message of great hope that we are not beaten by death. In the here and now resurrection is an invitation to live by hope. There is a personal invitation to each and every one of us – we are invited to let God’s love grow in our heart – and in that way he is always there for us, helping us to face all of life’s challenges, even in the darkest of times.

“We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song.”

Alleluia Christ is Risen -

He is Risen indeed – Alleluia.