

## **Easter Sunday 2020**

### **John 20: 1-18**

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Happy Easter! There I've said it, but in the anticipation of saying it, it felt all wrong. Easier to say; "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" That is an eternal truth. "Happy Easter" is so much here and now; and I know that for so many people at the present time happiness is something that they just aren't experiencing. They may be anxious and afraid, about their families, their

health, their jobs, their bills, and their future. They may be isolated and lonely, sick and bereaved, and they are denied their usual coping mechanisms, the cup of coffee with a friend, the warmth of human embrace, the hand on the arm or the arm round the shoulder. So I'm going to look with you at today's Gospel reading and see how the eternal truth of Christ's resurrection can be our anchor and inspiration during these uncertain times.

Mary Magdalen and perhaps some other women, came to Jesus' tomb early, before it

was light, perhaps to complete the anointing of His body which had been so rushed on Friday, but also just to be near Him – there was a belief that the spirit of the deceased remained near the body for 3 days, and it was traditional to visit the tomb daily during that time. But the stone had been rolled away. Grave robbing was common then, linen and spices were expensive items and had a re-sale value, so that is what she assumed had happened; such a cruel twist to add to her unbearable sorrow. She couldn't handle it so she ran for help to the disciples. Peter and John ran to the tomb, John was

younger and quicker but Peter, ever the doer, ran straight in. And what did they find? Not a ransacked tomb but the grave clothes lying neatly where Jesus' body had been; they hadn't been removed Jesus had simply passed through them, leaving them undisturbed. And we are told that John believed, he hadn't seen the risen Christ, he hadn't experienced His presence but on the evidence of his own eyes, he believed that Jesus had risen; and Peter saw it too so he was not dreaming. Later John would meet the risen Christ and even later understand from scripture that this was what God had

always planned, but for now he simply believed.

After the men had left, Mary Magdalen returned to the tomb still certain in her own mind that the body of Jesus had been stolen, and still searching for Him. You might have thought that meeting two angels in the tomb would have told her that God was at work, but she was still clinging to the grave robber story as she turned and saw Jesus. She didn't recognise Him, maybe because it defied her expectations, maybe because her eyes were filled with tears, maybe because the risen

Jesus actually looked different, maybe all three. And certainly she still clung to the grave robber story even as He spoke to her in concern for her distress, and gently challenged her to think again; but she took his questions at face value as well she might in her distressed state. But then He addressed her by name, and all at once, she saw that it really was Jesus and that He was alive. She was enthralled "It's really you" she said and fell to the ground clinging to his feet, but Jesus had a job for her. She was to go and tell the disciples that she has seen Him and give them His message. Jesus

said; 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Which is exactly what she did.

Mary Magdalen was the first person to see the risen Christ and the first person to tell someone else, she was the Apostle to the Apostles. Given at that time the testimony of a woman was not accepted in court, it's astonishing that this is credited to her in all four gospels, and certainly not something anyone at the time would have included in

the story if it hadn't been a well attested fact.

As we listen to the story which starts in the darkness of grief, fear, confusion, and despair; we hear how the truth was revealed. We learn how those who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus came gradually, in their own time, to believe it. For John it was as he saw the grave clothes for himself; and some of us have to see things for ourselves too. For Mary Magdalen it was when she heard her name. For us there are deep echoes of the story of the good

shepherd, who knows his sheep, and calls them by name, and the sheep know the shepherd's voice. Jesus knows our names too, are we listening for His voice and if we hear, do we believe? And as the story goes on others will have their moments of revelation. For St John and all the early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus was the unchangeable fact on which they based their faith and lived their lives. They heard the story from those who had actually seen the risen Christ and they could also see the difference it made in the lives of those witnesses; and so they in turn came to faith,

allowing their risen Lord to rule in their lives and by the power of the Holy Spirit to change them too. And still it goes on. Do we see the evidence of changed lives and want to know more?

So how might that help us in our present situation? It shows us how the lives of these ordinary, frightened, distressed people were transformed by the reality of the risen Christ. They weren't transported to a different time and place where all their troubles were over, they were still an oppressed minority in an occupied land and they still had many

challenges to face, but the risen Christ was with them and they knew that this world of stress, pain and death was not all there is. Love had conquered. They believed it. Do we believe it? Are we fully aware that the Risen Christ still stands among us and will be with us whatever challenges we have to face? It is not an accident of grammar that we declare at each Parish Communion service “Christ has died. Christ **is** risen. Christ will come again”.

We can love because God first loved us, apart or together, in Jesus’ name let us

experience that love and show that same love to those around us.

Happy Easter!

Revd Dr Tina Dixon