



Revd Ro's Reflection on Easter Day 2022

John 20. 1-18

'The day of Resurrection! Earth, tell it out abroad.'

This Easter Sunday I am concentrating on the gospel reading from St. John. I remember when I was training for the priesthood at Queen's College we spent one Holy Week together in reflection, silence, study and observation of the services. It was a roller coaster of emotion for us all and one of the most profoundly moving weeks of my life. The services were beautiful and I can remember distinctly sitting in the candlelit chapel while my feet were washed on Maundy Thursday. Easter Sunday was a day of joy and praise to God who walked with humanity and who died and was raised. We can only imagine the emotions that must have gripped Jesus' disciples and his followers as they experienced at first hand the events of that final week. From the joy of the triumphal entry through to the Last Supper and Jesus indicating that he was the Lamb of God who by his death would take away the sins of the world. They sat silently in the upper room as Jesus instituted what would become the Eucharist and they heard those words; 'Do this in remembrance of me,' for the first time. And of course in St John's gospel the emphasis is on the foot washing. In the shadowy light Jesus meets Peter's concerned gaze and he shows humility and the path of love and of service they must follow. There had been the agony in the garden, the betrayal by one of their own and the awful turmoil of the arrest where the only still point was Jesus who was totally in control because he was walking the path of destiny. The desertion and denial bought its own guilt. The gospel writers make it clear that only a few women and one disciple watch the crucifixion and St John is specific, 'Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.' (John 19)

The horror of these events and the awful loss must have caused a terrible grief, sorrow and a feeling of stark emptiness and deep depression. I wonder, in all this miasma of grief, if even an echo of

Jesus' prophecy - that all these things must come to pass but that he would rise again on the third day - came to any of them.

All these feelings must have been swirling around in the mind of Mary Magdalene as she; loyal to her master to the last, came to the tomb in the early morning. It was a brave thing to do; she would expect to see a sealed tomb and to have to beg surly guards to open it. We are not told what emotions she felt when she first saw that the tomb was empty but it must have been horror. Wasn't it enough that they had destroyed the Lord in such a vile way; couldn't they even leave him to rest in peace now? She does the natural thing she runs to Simon Peter who is the leader of the disciples.

² 'So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Unlike Peter and most of the other disciples Mary has never deserted her Lord. Mary Magdalene is not a shadowy figure in the gospels. Mary is mentioned in Luke, 'Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,' She owed her new life to Jesus and she follows Jesus and the disciples with the other women tending to their needs and listening to Jesus' teaching. She is mentioned twelve times in the Gospels. Mary was a woman, women could not give evidence in court yet Mary was to bear witness to the greatest truth in history – the Resurrection! For now she is still distressed and relies on the disciples,

³ 'Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.'

Peter and John run to the tomb and John sees the linen wrappings. This always makes me think of a lecture I heard on the Shroud of Turin, whether the shroud is authentic, the burial cloth of Christ, we can leave aside here. The point is it bears the imprint of a crucified man. It brought home to me the horror of death by crucifixion. Mary and John had witnessed that at first hand. Jesus was dead and buried; she had come to serve him in love for the last time, now he had gone. It is the ever impulsive Peter who enters the tomb first and St. John's gospel is very specific about what he saw.

'He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.'

It is John who follows and we are told he believed.

⁸ 'Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.'

As yet they simply could not understand what Jesus had told them. The Resurrection must follow Good Friday for the triumph over sin and death to be complete. The theology was beyond them. For now the body has gone and they simply leave. Not so Mary,

¹¹ 'But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'

It is Mary who sees the angels; it is Mary who asks where Jesus is laid. Her state of mind is obvious as she weeps and stares into the tomb.

¹⁴ 'When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.'

What this sentence means has been debated for centuries. Why didn't she recognise Jesus whom she had followed and served in love for so long? Was this body different? The disciples have no trouble recognising Jesus in the upper room though those on the road to Emmaus don't recognise him either. We will never know but I think it is important that Jesus is at pains to show that his resurrected body is real. He eats fish, tells Thomas to put his fingers into the holes the nails have made. This is no ghost, no spirit; this is the crucified and risen Christ, God and man. Mary has been weeping, her eyes are full of tears, and she stands at the mouth of the dark tomb in the early morning, if the sun was behind Jesus she would see only a silhouette. That rising sun is a powerful symbol too. Then he speaks to her.

¹⁵ 'Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'

Once again there is the plea which stems from deep love. It is the next word which turns everything around.

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'

It is that moment when Jesus addresses her as he always has by her name which reminds me of the words from Isaiah 43. 1.

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'

In that instant all is changed. She hears his voice speaking her name –she knows without doubt this is her Lord. He is alive! He is risen! I wonder if afterwards she thought of those words spoken to her sister Martha. 'I am the resurrection and I am life.'

'She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.'

What wonder and joy she must have felt. Night has become day in an instant. Her reaction is so human it is a reaction of pure love she wants to hold him but Jesus' still has a mission and Mary is part of that. To her is given the greatest witness of all time.

'But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.'

For Mary the nightmare is over, her faith is certain. Of course the disciples are still mystified but Jesus will come to them at evening. Jesus is alive, 'love's redeeming work is done!'. Humanity has been redeemed by Jesus' self-giving love. The hymn says, 'There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.' It would be nearer the truth to say, 'There was none other but God made man could pay the price of sin.' It is only Jesus, who could redeem humanity by his death and resurrection. God so loved the world that at the incarnation Jesus God and man walked with us and trod the road that led to Calvary but also to the garden where death was vanquished. Jesus,

⁸ humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.' (Philippians 2)

I quote it because this sums up exactly who Jesus is and what he did for humanity. Only God can conquer death! The resurrection is the pivot of our faith. Without the Resurrection our faith would be in vain. As St. Paul says, 'If Jesus had not been raised then we are of all people most to be pitied, but Jesus was raised.' That is why Easter Day is the most important of the Christian year. Jesus our God walked with us and gave his life in love, by his death he redeemed the world and by his rising conquered death and sin forever. On this Easter Sunday may we feel some of the joy that Mary felt as she saw her risen Lord, and may we know that he is, 'with us always even to the end of time.'

'Jesus Christ is risen today. Alleluia! Our triumphant holy day. Alleluia!' From Lyra Davidica

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