

Easter Day

'He is Risen!'

'He is Risen indeed!'

Reading: John 20:1-18 Good News Translation (GNT)

Music - Resurrection Song - Stuart Townend <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xM-fpXayUg>

The Empty Tomb

²⁰ Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. ² She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. ⁴ The two of them were running, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and saw the linen cloths, but he did not go in. ⁶ Behind him came Simon Peter, and he went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there ⁷ and the cloth which had been around Jesus' head. It was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in; he saw and believed. (⁹ They still did not understand the scripture which said that he must rise from death.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back home.

¹¹ Mary stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb ¹² and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ "Woman, why are you crying?" they asked her.

She answered, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!"

¹⁴ Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ "Woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who is it that you are looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener, so she said to him, "If you took him away, sir, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned toward him and said in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (This means "Teacher.")

¹⁷“Do not hold on to me,” Jesus told her, “because I have not yet gone back up to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God.”

¹⁸So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and related to them what he had told her.

Mary Magdalene.

A name we all know through the stories that have been created about who she was. However,

If we go back to Scripture alone we actually discover very little. Apart from her presence at the cross which is noted in Matthew's, Mark's and John's Gospels, and her central place in the resurrection narratives in all four Gospel and especially John, the only other time Mary Magdalene is actually named is at Luke 8:2 where we are told about a woman: 'Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out.' So we do not know the identity of the mysterious woman in Luke's account who bathes Jesus' feet - Luke 7:37-38 'In that town was a woman who lived a sinful life. She heard that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, so she brought an alabaster jar full of perfume and stood behind Jesus, by his feet, crying and wetting his feet with her tears. Then she dried his feet with her hair, kissed them, and poured the perfume on them.' (In John's Gospel, Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus is named as the one who anoints Jesus with perfume and wipes his feet with her hair, but this may have been a separate occasion). But Pope Gregory the Great gives us the first recorded example of the woman being named as Mary Magdalene, and from that point on, the tradition that this unnamed prostitute was Mary Magdalene gained widespread acceptance.

So from the Gospels the only thing we know for certain is that Jesus healed her of being possessed by seven demons.

Jesus healed Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross and watched Jesus die. Mary Magdalene saw where Jesus was placed in a tomb. Early on Sunday morning it was Mary Magdalene who went to the tomb with spices to anoint His body.

I think legitimately we can conclude that Mary's life was marked by gratitude and indebtedness to Jesus. It is this, and her tenacious commitment to being with him in his death and in his burial, that makes her such a considerable person in this story.

The testimony of women was not accepted in courts of law in Jesus' time. Women had no standing at all in society. For all four gospels to mention that it was women who were

the first witnesses at the empty tomb gives huge credence to the whole story. If someone in the first century had wanted to invent a story about people seeing the risen Jesus, they wouldn't have dreamed of giving the star part to a woman. Let alone Mary Magdalene.

But here we read that it is Mary that has the first wonderful encounter with the Risen Christ. Peter and John came running to the tomb, after Mary ran and got them, (there's more running in these few verses than anywhere else in the New Testament), but once they had seen the empty tomb they left.

But Mary stays and she is obviously in a terrible state, her eyes full of tears, and her imagination full of macabre visions of death and grave-robbers. She is utterly single-minded in her search for the dead body of her Lord, to the point where even a meeting with a pair of angels becomes uninteresting unless they can give her the one piece of information she wants.

But Mary doesn't immediately see who Jesus is as he stands beside her in the garden. There doesn't seem any real explanations of why she does not recognise Jesus. Her intuitive guess that he must be the gardener, was wrong at one level, and right, deeply right at another. This is the new creation. Jesus is the beginning of it. He is the new Adam, the gardener, charged with bringing the chaos of God's creation into new order, into flower, into fruitfulness. He has come to uproot the thorns and thistles and replace them with blossoms and harvest.

Then Jesus calls her name 'Mary'. In the same way Jesus calls your name, my name. It is greeting, consolation, gentle rebuke ('Come on! Don't you know me?') and invitation, all rolled into one. Of course, like Mary we know him. Of course, like Mary we don't know him. He is the same. He is different. He is alive, with a new sort of life, the like of which we've never seen before.

The most puzzling feature of the passage however, is Jesus' warning to Mary in verse 17 'Do not hold onto me'. Some have thought that his resurrection body was so different and so new that he didn't want Mary trying to touch him. Perhaps instead it was a warning to Mary that the new relationship with him was not going to be like the old one. He wouldn't be going around with her and the disciples anymore, walking the lanes with them, sharing regular meals, discussing, talking, praying. They would see him now and then, but soon it would be time for him to 'go to the father'.

Mary is not upset by this. She doesn't take it as a rebuff, for Jesus has given her a job to do, to go back and tell the other disciples what she has seen.

Likewise, we are sent out to shout out what we have seen. To find signs of him in the robes of the gardener, listening for the familiar sound of the beloved voice of the Lord in

the strangers around us, helping to build bridges of love that will enable others, too, to hear Jesus' voice and recognise the vast, free, unchanging, faithful love of God.

We are to follow Mary's example, to tell others what we have seen, what we know, and to tell them about a God that loves them so much that he allowed his Son to die on a cross for us, and that he rose again so that our relationship with our heavenly Father would be restored.

This Easter, more than ever, we need to proclaim the risen Christ to those around us. Yes, we are going through dark times at the moment, but with faith in God and Jesus Christ as his risen Son we can have hope for the future.

Mary Magdalene is our role model. She was healed by Jesus, followed Him, mourned for him on Good Friday, found Him again gloriously on Easter morning, in the garden, as the risen Messiah, and she went back and told others what she had seen. Through her we share that wonderful story. Although she is not mentioned again by name, I believe that that moment when she met the Risen Lord was a moment she recounted to everyone, everywhere she went, for ever after.

If you were her - wouldn't you?

So - will you?

This Easter we need more Marys. Be like Mary.

Run and tell the world 'He is Risen!!!' 'He is Risen indeed!!!'

Prayer:

As Christ burst forth from the tomb,
may new life burst forth from us
and show itself in acts of love and healing to a hurting world.
May we follow Mary in telling people what we have seen.

And may the same Christ,
who lives forever and is the source of our new life,
keep your hearts rejoicing and grant you peace
this day and always. Amen.

Music: (you'll need to skip the ad at the beginning!): 'In Christ alone' by Stuart Townend

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouGuG97l2RY&list=RDouGuG97l2RY&index=1>