

- How do you decide if you know someone well?
- There are people who I pass everyday in the churchyard and smile and say hallo to. I might even comment on the weather or their dog, but I know nothing about them, not where they live, or what they enjoy, nor even their name. I don't think that counts as knowing someone well.
- Then there are people you may chat to in the pub or because you play a sport with them or because you meet them regularly at the school gate. You almost certainly know these people better. You probably know all about where they went on holiday – that's an easy subject to talk about. If they have children you probably know quite a lot about them as well. But you may not have broached more difficult or sensitive issues that affect you or them more emotionally. Do you know these people well? And do they know you as well as you know them?
 - There's something here about time spent in a relationship with another human being. You spend more time with them than you do with a casual acquaintance you meet on the street. To know someone well seems to require an investment of time but probably something more than that as well.
- There then are likely to be a much smaller number of people who you know really well. To whom it is easy to open up with and share what you really think. What really worries you or delights you. We'd surely all agree that this does count as knowing someone well. You put yourself out for them and actively make time to be with them, either to listen or to talk. When they hurt, you hurt too. When they laugh, you are actively pleased. But you can probably count this group of people on the fingers of one hand.
- Mary Magdalene and Jesus were in this third category. Spending large amounts of time together. But also sharing things that really mattered. And being prepared to make sacrifices that matter for each other.
 - Mary Magdalene clearly really loved Jesus and probably thought he was invincible, what with the miracles and the crowd pulling and the decisive leadership he'd shown.
 - And then he'd been killed on a cross. It had all happened so quickly. One evening they'd been sharing bread and wine together for the Passover meal. By 3 o'clock the following afternoon he was dead. Her brain couldn't process what was going on. But she knew she was numb and hurting.
- They'd taken his body down from the cross and put it in this tomb and a great stone had been rolled over the mouth of the tomb. And bereft and hopeless, they'd gone home. For what was there left to hope for? Who else in her troubled life had ever shown Mary Magdalene such committed support and direction and had believed in her in a way she'd never been believed in before?
- Just over 36 hours later she'd returned, drawn by a magnet to spend some time at the grave. To weep. To wonder 'what if ...?' But those 'what ifs ...' were pointless because he was dead. His life which had seemed so full of promise had ended in failure.
 - She arrived back down at the tomb when it was still dark to find, horror of horrors, that it had been desecrated, the stone rolled away, the body gone. Was nothing sacred?
- John tells the story with consummate skill as events start to move very fast. She rushes to Peter and John who, shocked, run back with her. John, the younger, gets there first and discovers the discarded grave clothes. Then Peter, puffing and out of breath arrives, and goes into the tomb and sees Jesus's head cloth rolled up in another corner. Finally John comes in and begins to grasp what has happened. But of Jesus they saw nothing.
 - And it's left to Mary Magdalene, tearful, grieving female, unreliable Mary Magdalene, to see the angels, and, through her tears, the gardener, or was it the gardener? To hear his voice and finally, unbelievably, to hear her name. Her name. Mary. And to believe the impossible. Jesus - her friend who knew her better than she knew herself - was alive. Was really alive!
 - And she rushed and told the slower men. *'I have seen the Lord'*!

- The stone barrier had been rolled away. The barrier of death had been overcome. The barrier of grief and loss and hopelessness and unfulfilled dreams had been transformed in an instant into new hope, new promise, and shocked joy. The broken relationship was broken no more.
- If that's so, it's lovely. And we can choose to leave it safely in the past. The resurrection is history but actually it doesn't change very much about the world today. Or does it?
- How well do you know Jesus? Is he a passing acquaintance? A 'friend' with whom you pass some time when you happen to meet? Or a close companion to whom you can bear your soul? If he is then the benefits outlined in the New Testament reading from Acts that we'll hear in a few minutes are probably familiar to you.
- It's no accident that we go to hear it when we share the bread and wine at communion because that is when we are nearest to Jesus. Sharing a meal with him as Mary Magdalene did at the Last Supper; as the disciples did on the road to Emmaus after Jesus had risen from the dead on the evening of Easter Day.
- The reading is on page 7 of your yellow service booklet. When you hear the words watch out for the biblical promises that the resurrection brings the assurance of '*peace by Jesus Christ*'. Peace in our hearts following the victory of good over the evil that put him on the cross. A hope that one day this will reach all humanity, the whole of creation as (in verse 42) '*Christ is ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.*' A judge whose tendency is to be merciful and to forgive, because '*everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*' And who could resist believing in him when you meet him?
- And I'm sure it's easier to believe in him when you share a meal with Jesus. As the reading says, '*God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*' And we are eating and drinking with him at communion.
- So rejoice in this. And if you're not sure that you do know Jesus very well, discover more. Join one of our Home Groups or our Faith Confirmed Group and discover more about the difference Jesus makes to your life.
- And that's not the end of it. The resurrection of Jesus has the power to change society, if only we'd let it.
 - The fact that you are in church today, probably means that you think it does make a difference. But could you say what? The wonderful truth is that the better you get to know Jesus, the more effect it has on the world around you.
 - We are eating and drinking with the risen Jesus today when we share in bread and wine and remember his words, '*This is my body ... This is my blood ...*' But surely that's just a personal thing between us and God and doesn't make any difference to the rest of the world. My religion is my concern and nobody else's. It's private and I'm only going to talk about it with a few very close friends!
- I don't think it can be a co-incidence that we live in an individualistic Western society, where anything goes, as long as it feels right with me. A society where humans are increasingly urged to put themselves first 'because you deserve it'. Believe what you want. Eat what you want never mind that it's shipped from the other side of the world. Turn up your heating because it's a chilly day but don't take any personal responsibility for the melting polar ice caps. Demand excellence in schools but quietly ignore the rising mental health issues of children who feel compelled to jump through hoops else they will feel failures. A society where we have more ways than ever of contacting each other but where there are more lonely people in the community than ever before. I don't think it can be a co-incidence that all this is happening whilst at the same time the Church along with every other organised community group, is reducing in numbers.
- Well perhaps now is the time for Christians to make a stand! Make a counter-cultural decision and allow your faith to change your life! Don't keep it private, but go home from church today and proclaim loudly with Mary Magdalene, '*I have seen the Lord*'. Eat and drink with Jesus. Judge whether the world you inhabit, the way you live your life, is heading towards disaster, or will be of benefit to society. Be prepared to forgive rather than hate yourself and forgive others rather than bear grudges, and peace in your own community will rise.
- If you do that you will realise that you are getting to know Jesus better every day.
 - And the biblical promises will be just as true today as they ever were.
- And we will be able to proclaim, '*Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*'