**Easter Sunday 2021**

**The Resurrection of Jesus John 20:1-18**

**20**Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. **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.” **3**Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. **4**The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5**He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. **6**Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, **7**and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. **8**Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; **9**for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. **10**Then the disciples returned to their homes.

**Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene**

**11**But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look[a] into the tomb; **12**and 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. **13**They 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.” **14**When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. **15**Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” 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.” **16**Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, [b] “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). **17**Jesus said to her, “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.’” **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.

Alleluia! He is risen, He is risen indeed Alleluia!

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit amen please sit down.

What a few days it had been, no sleep, no comfort, no wanting of food, since she left the field of crucifixion at Golgotha, Mary Magdalene had spent her time pacing up-and-down, crying, unable to settle, she hadn’t changed her clothes, other than some stale bread and water she had not eaten and now before the Dawn she slipped on her sandals, opened the door, and went out into the cool street below. Around her, the sounds and smells of the city awakening. Not wanting to speak to anyone she covered her forehead and hurried along towards the burial-ground, towards the private plots area, to Joseph of Arimathea’s reserved tomb.

She felt drained from the tears and now she didn’t want to cry anymore, she wanted to sit outside, to rest her head on the cool stone blocking the entrance, she wanted to be close once more to the one who had saved her, to the man she adored, to her rabbi, Jesus. And, as she walked along the gravel path to the plot, the sun was turning the sky to a milky, hazy, pink colour, the promise of a new day ahead. She turned off the path at the fork and headed towards the hillside where she knew the tomb was, the dew on the damp grass cooling her feet, and then, as the tomb came into view,....something was wrong..... She couldn’t’t work out what but it looked different to how it was when she left yesterday. And then she realised, the entrance stone. The stone blocking the opening had been rolled away and there was now a gap. She began to cry as she approached the tomb entrance and peered into the darkness, expecting to see Jesus ‘s body.....expecting......... her eyes adjusted to the gloom inside and then..... as she looked, she realised his body was not there! The shelf where his body had been laid was empty....or was it? The linen wrappings that his body had been wrapped in were folded neatly and as she cautiously stepped into the tomb an iridescent light shone and she saw two angels sat on the shelf. As she looked at them, trying to make sense of the scene in front of her, she felt a presence behind her. Turning around she saw a gardener, he said

,“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”

She fell to her knees as she replied: “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

And then Jesus looked at her with those eyes she knew so well and said “Mary”. And at that moment she recognised him, she scrambled up from her knees approaching him and said “Rabbouni”, but he stepped back from her and 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.’” She uncovered her head, looked at him, nodded, turned, and ran to the house where the disciples were staying. As she ran, the sun rose above the horizon and the morning chorus heralded in the new beautiful day. With her heart light, 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.

Alleluia, He is risen, He is risen indeed Alleluia!

If you needed someone to act as a witness for you, who would you choose? If you had to pick someone to provide you with a character reference, who would that person be?

If I had to do that, I'm sure I'd select the most respectable person I could think of, someone respected or in authority like a doctor, a teacher or solicitor, or a member of the clergy!

Now, we can assume that God could choose anyone at all to witness to Jesus rising from the dead. So, why did He choose Mary, of all people. She seemed the unlikeliest witness of all.

Firstly, Mary was a woman, and in Jewish society at that time, women were thought of as unreliable witnesses - they couldn't testify in a court of law.

Secondly, Mary was a woman with a dubious past, known for her odd and erratic behaviour.

All her life people had avoided her or laughed at her. All her life people in authority had written her off; told her she was no use, a menace to society. A sinner. Down there with the drug users and the homeless.

We may know people like that ourselves, people who everyone else condemns. Perhaps, we feel like that ourselves at times when people avoid or mistreat or abuse or condemn us.

But there is good news in the fact that God chose Mary, it's good news because it’s evidence that the story must be true.

Any gospel writer wanting to establish beyond all doubt that the story was true, that Jesus was risen, would surely not have placed the most unreliable witness at the heart of the story.

They'd have a lawyer, or Pilate, or the chief priest, meeting the risen Jesus. Their word proving beyond doubt the accuracy of the story.

But that the events were reported by Mary Magdalene has the ring of reality about it - throughout the Bible, God seems to speak through the unlikely ones.

And its good news that God made Mary the chief witness to the resurrection because Mary is someone we can relate to.

We like her, and we are like her, the imperfect one. We are like her, in our own imperfections. We like her, the misunderstood one. We are like her, the misunderstood.

But how did Mary know it was Jesus, talking to her there in the garden? What made her realise that it was her love, her Lord, alive and in front of her? She hadn't realised at first. It was when he did something specific that she knew. It was when he spoke her name. "Mary". Her heart missed a beat, because that was the voice of someone who was close to her. That was the voice of someone who loved her. The voice of someone who knew her name. "Mary".

God chooses the unlikeliest people to share his good news with.

His good news is the unlikeliest sort of news we'll ever hear. The good news is, in a nutshell - God loves us.

Each and every one of us, no matter what we have or have not said or done.

God sent His only Son, Jesus, to earth to live like us, and God sacrificed Him in the cross for us, and, through this act, Jesus saves us.

Before Jesus, redemption was only accessible to those who could afford a sacrifice, and then the sacrifice was personal, my lamb or two pigeons presented to the Temple was my own offering to God, yes, once a year the scapegoat was sent out by the high priest for the sins of the Jewish nation but what about the Gentiles living in the holy land too?

God changed this through Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice.

His coming-back from death means an end to death for those who believe, a forgiveness of sins, an abundance of life, eternal life.

By coming here today, we, like Mary have been called and chosen to spread the Good News. This can be daunting and how do we do it?? The best way may be to start small,

- You could think of someone you know who you would like to share God’s love with and pray for them,

- Pray perhaps that you will be given the opportunity to speak with them and that a conversation may open up, and that you will be given the words to say to tell them about Jesus.

- Or pray that you will be given the strength to confidently go about your daily life following your Christian values, not waylaid by the temptations and distractions of living in the 21st century. That you can become a role model for a modern Christian, so that people think...I want some of what he or she has got!

Conversations and changes may not happen immediately because we don’t know Gods timescales, but be assured, if it is meant to be it will happen, sometimes when we least expect it.

Today we have heard Mary’s experience, with my interpretation.

We understand that God chose her, an underdog, to relay the most important message in the world. That he can choose Mary means that he can choose us too.

We might feel unworthy to be chosen to receive his wonderful love, at times. But he chooses to share it with us anyway. And that's why at Easter we can't help saying,

Alleluia! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

I wish you all a Happy and blessed Easter-tide. Amen.

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