

5th April, 2015. Easter Sunday

Reading: John 20: 1 -18

Sermon: Mary Magdalene's Experience

Mary went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been moved. Can you imagine going to the cemetery and discovering that someone had interfered with the grave of someone you loved? I was in that position a couple of years after mum died. I went up to the cemetery and the turf had been cut up and it looked as it does on a new grave where the ground has not yet settled. I was beside myself because I couldn't understand why anyone had been near our grave without telling me, why anyone had been digging it because that was how it looked. However, it was simply the case that more soil had been added to level off the ground and the grass relaid. A simple explanation but a harrowing experience.

Mary goes to the tomb in which Jesus was buried and sees the stone rolled away from the entrance. Her reaction, her panic, her despair is evident. For her, it is a harrowing experience. She runs to Peter and John and

says: **They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!**

John got to the tomb first and looked at the bits of cloth. He said nothing. What was he thinking? A couple of years ago, I preached on this and we considered what might be going through the minds of the two disciples at that point. What we do know is that **they still didn't understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.** Are they shocked? Are they confused? Are they fearful? Are they questioning? They discussed nothing with Mary. They simply left her alone in the garden and went back to where they were staying. I preached on that last year, on the way they just abandoned her.

However, it was then that Jesus came to her, when she was alone and distraught. He spoke to her in her confused state. He called her by name. It was personal. He was ministering to her as an individual in desperate need of hope and she received it.

It's what Jesus does. He meets us where we are when we least expect it and he offers us comfort and hope in

times of despair and confusion. Jesus lifted Mary out of a pit of confusion, out of a pit of despair and He set her feet on solid ground. Once she felt secure, He sent her to minister to the disciples, to tell them the good news that Jesus was alive, that He was risen from the dead.

I share with you now a Meditation of Mary Magdalene from a Book entitled: Reflective Services for Lent, Holy Week and Easter. It's as if Mary herself is speaking.

They're not going to listen, I can you that now.

They've always been suspicious of me, right from the start, wondering what Jesus was thinking of, getting mixed up with someone like me.

I know what they'll say, you mark my words -

'Making it all up.'

'Wanting to be the centre of attention as usual.'

'A lovesick fool.'

Not that I can blame them.

It didn't do His cause any good, after all, when I came along.

A few tax-collectors those Pharisees could stomach,

but me, I really put the cat among the pigeons.
I know how the tongues wagged,
how easy it became to criticise.
Maybe I should have stayed away,
kept my distance, but I loved him.
No, not in the sense they meant with their sly, dark
innuendo,
but deeper,
with everything I am,
everything I've got,
in a way that I've never loved before.
Yet not even the disciples really trusted me, I know that.
They found it hard to accept,
hard to forgive what I'd been.
And I can understand that -
let's face it, I'm finding it hard to forgive them for running
away, failing Him when He needed them most.
But what I hold on to is those words from the cross:
'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'
He understood we all fail Him,

that we're all unworthy,
none of us perfect,
yet He forgave us and loved us despite that.
I thought I'd lost Him,
the only one who ever truly accepted me,
and I was reconciled to struggling on alone,
no one to understand,
no one to offer their support.
But I was wrong, for He came to me.
There in the garden, overwhelmed by my grief,
He came to me, and hope was born again.
Not that I could believe it at first.
The voice was familiar,
the face,
the eyes,
but I told myself it couldn't be,
that it had to be the gardener,
anyone but Jesus.
And they'll do the same, I'm sure of it,
tell me I got it wrong,

that I'm overwrought,
ready to believe anything.

They won't listen, I can tell you that now, but then I'm
used to that, aren't I?

And it doesn't matter any more,

for He's accepted me,

as He's accepted them,

as He accepts everyone who's ready to respond to His love
and receive His forgiveness.

The person the disciples turned their backs on, was
the one who brought them the news of the resurrection.
Mary was the one who was first to offer them hope in their
despair and their confusion and there is hope offered to
each one of us who is ready to respond to His love and to
receive His forgiveness.

Hope comes from Jesus himself, resurrected, risen,
alive and walking in the garden but there is also an
additional kind of hope offered to us by the cloth which
was round Jesus' head and which was left behind in the
tomb.

John says: **The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.** When Lazarus came out of the tomb, he was still bound. Jesus is free of all those trappings and we can see Him as He is. Nothing hides the face of our Lord from us especially when He calls us by name.

It's like the hymn says:

Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by your name;

you are mine.

When you walk through the waters,

I'll be with you;

you will never sink beneath the waves.

When the fire is burning all around you,
you will never be consumed by the flames.

When the fear of loneliness is looming,

then remember I am at your side.

When you dwell in the exile of a stranger,
remember you are precious in my eyes.

Leave here today in the hope of our Easter faith in the risen Lord, the one who calls us by Name at the most unexpected moments.

Offering JP 2 Abba Father

Hymn 374 To God be the glory

Benediction