

20th April, 2014.

Reading: John 20: 1 – 18

Sermon: Called to Action

I have really struggled over the last couple of days to find a message for today and yet I suspect that that is the position that the Jesus' friends, Mary, Peter and John were in as they approached Jesus' tomb.

The men walked together but Mary was on her own. The worst that could happen to them had happened. Jesus, their friend, their Messiah, their Lord and King had walked into Jerusalem knowing that he would be arrested and killed and yet he went to his death.

The chief priests and Pharisees did not come looking for him. He went there himself and was betrayed by one of their friends, by Judas. Judas went looking for the chief priests and the Pharisees and told them, for a price, where they could find Jesus and then he took the soldiers to Jesus and kissed him, the ultimate betrayal, betrayed by a sign of friendship.

On Easter morning, his friends head for the tomb, I suspect in silence. They walk there with their own thoughts but that silence is broken by Mary's screams that they have taken Jesus and that they don't know where he has been put. She is beside herself and the men run to the tomb to see for themselves.

That first Easter morning does not begin as a morning of joy and celebration. It begins as a morning of heartbreak and of fear and of pain.

As Peter and John approach the tomb, John suddenly realises what has happened. **He believed**, it says in his gospel. He knew suddenly that what Jesus had said, that **on the third day he will be raised to life!** was true but he remained silent. As he says in his gospel, they still didn't understand what it was all about but he certainly had a lot to think about.

Earlier in John's gospel Jesus says to the disciples: **now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.**

There was so much that Jesus had said that the disciples couldn't possibly have understood but now John was beginning to understand the meaning behind so much of what Jesus had said and was beginning to believe but he kept that to himself. Maybe he wasn't sure enough to say anything.

They were after all in shock that the tomb was empty and there would have been no reasoning with the others at that point.

It was into that situation that Jesus stepped when Mary was once again on her own and although he asked her a question which she answered, there was no recognition. He then said just one word which transformed her life. He said her name. **Jesus said to her, 'Mary'** and the light dawned.

He stepped into a situation of human grief and pain. He came to Mary at her lowest and spoke to her and his presence changed her situation from one of grief and pain to one of joy and of hope.

But Jesus didn't speak to Mary and bring that recognition just so that Mary could go away happy and get on with her life. He spoke to her so that she could become an apostle to the apostles. He spoke to her so that she could take the news of his resurrection, the news that he was alive to all his friends, to his disciples, as a first step to mission.

The knowledge that Jesus was alive heralded a new beginning. It called for action, not just for celebration. I wonder today if we have got stuck in the celebration and have forgotten that there is message to take out into the world. We come faithfully to worship but what do we do with the message when leave here. Do we take that information and keep it to ourselves or do we look for ways of sharing it with others?

Jesus said to Mary, 'Do not hold on to me'. Don't keep me to yourself. **Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'** They are being told that their relationship with God is personal. He is their Father and their God. He is our Father and our God. That in itself calls for some kind of response, some kind of action, some kind of relationship, the kind of relationship which you would want with your children.

Anyway, John, when he left the tomb, kept Jesus to himself. He believed but he told no one his thoughts. Mary, on the other hand, was told to go and share the news, to go and tell and she did. **'I have seen the Lord!'** she said, and she told them all that Jesus had said to her.

I have never really thought about it before but a comment on the Church of Scotland website got me thinking.

I mentioned a moment ago that when Jesus spoke to Mary her life was transformed. Her grief turned to joy.

It's interesting that Mary initially thought Jesus was the gardener and maybe that is more significant than I have ever considered because in a way He is the gardener.

Jesus was there at the beginning of Creation as the Word as we heard in our call to worship today. He was there as the Word before He was made flesh. He was there bringing life and order to the chaos of the universe in whatever way that happened. I don't have a problem with scientific theories. God can

still be behind it all and active in bringing about evolution and the whole creative process.

What's important for us today is that Jesus was there as the one who brought order and life. We're told that **In him was life and that life was the light of men.**

Following the resurrection, we have a new order and a recreation. Life was to change dramatically for the disciples. Those who believed were to become new creations in Christ. The gardener was to work in the lives of men and women and children so that God's kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven.

Mary was open to that transformation. She responded when her name was called. She went from that empty tomb with the news that Jesus was indeed alive, that he was risen and that she had seen him.

What will we do with that news today? Will we go off like John and say nothing or will we respond to the call for action so that others hear the news which has been revealed to us, that Jesus is indeed alive, that Jesus is risen so that we might have life now and for all eternity.

Jesus has called each one of us. What we now do in response to that call is our call. What will you do? What action will we take now that we believe Jesus is alive.