

April 12th 2020 Sermon for Easter Sunday –

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May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is Risen, Alleluia. What a joyous day today is. Today is a day when light springs up out of darkness. Today is a day when death is defeated. Today is a day when God shows the world that nothing can stop love from transforming our lives and this world. What a day today is.

I think with the current situation in the world, and so many people's lives being impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, that this Easter Sunday this message of light where there was darkness, is all the more important for us to hear. Because things may look bleak, but no matter how bleak it may appear, or how dark it gets, today we remember that nothing can stop the light of God, the love of God from reaching us.

For those of you who listened to my Good Friday message, you will know I challenged you to try and put yourself in the disciples' shoes. To journey with them over Good Friday and Easter Saturday. It was a difficult challenge. Good Friday was a day for them where all seemed lost and hopeless. The man whom they had given their whole lives to, had been killed in the most humiliating way possible. There really was nothing positive. The future looked as dark and bleak as it could possibly be. And the disciples had to stay in that place through Friday and Saturday. A place of hopelessness. Today we journey with them into the light of hope.

John's Resurrection narrative is I think my favourite from the Gospels. Partly because the response to everything seems to have a very human touch. You have the boyish response of Peter and the beloved disciple, who appear to enter into some kind of race to see who gets to the tomb first. But more than this, it is my favourite because of the narrative about Mary Magdalen. Because I think in her story we can see and learn so much about the journey the disciples have been on, and about the impact that Jesus being alive has. First, we have the important revelation that not only are the women the ones brave enough to go first to Jesus' tomb. But also that Jesus appears first to a woman, in Mary. It is a very important reminder for us in a world where the patriarchy still looms and impacts so much. It may have been Peter who was awarded the acholade of the founder of the church. But let us not forget that Mary Magelene was the first evangelist, the first person to spread the good news about the fact that Jesus is alive. And I think that is an important message for us to remember. But Mary gives us so much more than that. In her I think we have a window into the whole of humanity, because we can feel the emotion of this situation through her. We read and hear about the immense emotional impact the death of Jesus has had. She is alone, literally and metaphorically, and she feels she has nothing left. She woke up that morning hoping to gain some comfort in being able to at least see Jesus' body, and give it the proper burial it deserves. But even that has been take from her, with even his body now have apparently been stolen and taken away. So she stands outside the tomb crying, and her crying must have been all consuming, because when she bends down to look into the tomb, she does not seem surprised or bothered that there are two people there where Jesus body should have been. All she wants to know is where the body is. Mary here

shows us the desperation of our humanity, when all hope is removed, when we have lost everything, even the one thing she most wants at that time is lifeless.

And so it need not be Mary standing by that tomb. It could be any of us. Mary represents all of humanity, standing at the point of realisation that there is no hope. Life appears futile. The darkness of this for us as humans, cannot be underestimated. It is so much that even when Mary turns around and sees Jesus in front of her, she does not recognise him. And so Jesus asks her “why are you crying? Whom are you looking for?” In the darkness of despair even Jesus’ voice is not enough for her to recognise him, instead she thinks he must be the gardener. And so it is into this darkness and into this despair, that Jesus says **her name**. Try to imagine this moment. The beauty of the realisation for Mary. Jesus, the person she felt was completely lost, the person she loved most in the world, says her name. And with that one utterance God brings forth unbelievable light into the deep darkness of her despair.

And this is the same for us too. Into our darkness, whatever that might be, perhaps we feel unloved, perhaps we feel insignificant, perhaps we feel overwhelmed, perhaps we feel ashamed, perhaps we feel lost, or perhaps we feel hopeless. Into all of this, Jesus calls to us and says our name. Something so beautifully simple and yet incredibly intimate and personal. And God issues this call to each and every one of us. And in one word all is transformed. Because it means all the same things it meant to Mary. It means we are loved, it means we matter. It means God is with us. It means we are not alone. When Mary heard her name being called by Jesus, her life was transformed, the joy she must have felt is indescribable. And today Easter Sunday is the day for us to remember the same. That we are not alone, that Jesus is alive, God is with us. And the light of God will never ever be extinguished. And so as we go forth today, we go forth with that knowledge to warm our hearts and guide our way. This really is good news and it should change everything for us, just as it did for Mary and the rest of the disciples.

Today is a day of joy, and yes we would love to be gathered together today to celebrate and share this joy with each other but that day will come. And in many ways what we experience this Easter Sunday will probably be the closest experience we will have to the disciples experience, because like us the disciples felt trapped in a house, unable to leave. They were scared and afraid. And yet it is into that house, into that place that Jesus appears and says “Peace be with you.” And everything changed for them for ever. Where ever you are today, know that Jesus enters that place, and offers you his peace and the amazing hope for not only ourselves but for the entire world, that Jesus is not dead but is alive.

Brothers and sisters rejoice today, today is the day we remember the good news we have. So push aside everything else today, if you can, or if you have to work, then give yourself at least an hour to bask in the joy of knowing that Jesus is alive. And once we have celebrated today, we can remember we have the amazing job tomorrow that just like the disciples we are to share that good news far and wide in a world in desperate need of those life giving words. Jesus is alive. Amen.