

Acts 10:34-43**John 20:1-18****Introduction**

In our services this week we have been following the story of Jesus's last few days of life. On Thursday we remembered how he had celebrated Passover with the disciples and then on Friday we thought about his death on the cross. But the problem we have when we think about the events of that first Easter is that we do so with hindsight. There hasn't been a spoiler alert and we all know how the story ends. That makes it difficult, even on Good Friday for us to fully understand the absolute devastation and loss and confusion that Jesus' followers felt when he was brutally executed. Their hopes and dreams were shattered, this exciting time they had had in following Jesus had come to an abrupt end.

We approach Easter day in a mood of joy and happiness, of expectation and relief. But that is not how it was for the disciples that first Easter Day. They came to that dawn in despair and grief and that changed to horror as the events unfolded.

Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus's closest followers who had stood at the cross with Jesus's mother and the other women came to the tomb. Jesus' burial had been hurried because of the approaching Sabbath and there had been no time to properly prepare his body, to wash it and anoint it with ointment and spices. His body had simply been wrapped in grave cloths and left in the tomb. So she came now to do the final act of love and respect that we can do when we lose someone, to carry out the last offices.

She came also to be near to her master. She loved him deeply for the transformation he had brought to her life, he was her mentor and teacher and healer and she wanted to be close to him. It is hard to imagine the devastation and outrage she must have felt when arriving at the tomb she found it empty. The stone had been rolled away and the body had gone. So she ran – to where the disciples were hiding and to tell them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Someone unknown had done the unthinkable and stolen her Lord's body. Think for a moment how that must have felt.

The other disciples must have been appalled and confused as well. This surely was the last insult, pain upon pain. So they ran back to look. They found it just as she had told them. The stone had been rolled back the tomb was empty apart from the linen that had wound the body and the burial cloth that had covered his head. Even more confusing; whoever had taken the body had actually removed the wrappings before they took it. The wrappings were lying in place but their Lord's body had gone. We are told that the other disciple went into the tomb and "he saw and believed". It isn't clear quite what he believed because John goes on to

Acts 10:34-43**John 20:1-18**

tell us that they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. But he clearly believed that something momentous had happened.

So then they went home.

I wonder, have you ever missed out on something important because you were late or had gone before the end. I was listening to someone recounting how she had missed out on meeting her idol Eric Clapton – *tell story*.

She missed out on her dream because she went away before the end of the story

In the Gospel story, there is a marked contrast between Mary's response to the empty tomb and that of the two male disciples. As soon as Mary finds it, she runs to tell others, then returns to the scene where she remains weeping. Peter and the other disciple, however, neither weep nor spread the news but simply go home. It feels as if they have turned their backs on the mystery – all that they 'believed', seemingly, was that the tomb was empty. Because Mary gives herself over entirely to the emotion of grief she stays by the tomb, and because she 'stays with it' she enters more deeply into the mystery – and encounters the risen Jesus.

After the men had gone, still weeping, Mary bent over to look into the tomb and sees something that the men hadn't seen, 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."

Mary's sole focus at this point is on finding the body of her master. She isn't asking why this has happened or what the meaning of it is she simply wants to find Jesus. She is so focused on finding the missing body that when Jesus becomes present with her she doesn't recognize him at all.

People often ask, "How could she not have recognized him". Yes he has suffered deeply and been through death but surely she must have known him? Well firstly she wasn't expecting it to be Jesus. Jesus was dead and his body had been stolen how could this person in front of her be him? And also we know that in passing through death to new life Jesus was changed in some way.

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

Acts 10:34-43**John 20:1-18**

carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Mary's focus was absolute she couldn't see beyond the empty grave.

And then Jesus spoke her name – and everything changed. She stepped into another dimension. Transformation occurred. Her was her living Lord, 'Rabboni' she exclaimed, 'Teacher'. The hopeless grief and distress were wiped away. 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.'

For Mary reaching out to hold Jesus her concern was to embrace him and again be with him. But that was not Jesus's priority. He has come through death defeating the power of sin and the devil and was going to return to the father. He could not stay there in the garden with Mary savoring their closeness and joy. He had a job to do and so did she. Her job was now to proclaim the resurrection, to bring the Good News to the disciples and in the words Jesus uses we see the full extent of the transformation that has occurred: "*I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*"

Through his death and resurrection Jesus has bridged the gap between us and our creator God. His death for us and his power over death has taken away the barrier between us and has restored us to our original relationship with God. We can again call God our Father and our Lord.

The garden becomes 'a touching place' a place where our lives touch a mystery that we cannot fully understand or explain. But it is a place where hope is real. A place where we catch a glimpse of a different world, a world where our God reigns, and things that we can only dream of, are not only possible but actually happening. What was it he said? I have come to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed...

And if we believe – if our 'He is risen!' is more than just an Easter mantra – if we explore and follow through on the implications and consequences of what we proclaim today – then the future hope starts to become a present reality. And it all began when Mary heard her name called and went and told someone else of her experience. Who are you going to tell?