

Easter 2020

Collect God of glory, by the raising of your Son you have broken the chains of death and hell: fill your Church with faith and hope; for a new day has dawned and the way to life stands open in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

John 20.1–18

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 towards 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. ¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look 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 round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' 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, 'Rabboni!' (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.

Reflection

Have you had an experience of being rescued? Physically or emotionally rescued, in some way having a real sense of being rescued from danger, disease, from a virus, from harm. When Jesus was killed on the cross many of those closest to him were frightened. They did not have a sense of being rescued and they scattered. It was very different to when they were together with Jesus at the Last Supper. When within the Passover meal he had recalled the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the rescue of the Jewish people from slavery and oppression.

In the giving of the bread and wine Jesus also drew on the analogy of the suffering servant, the passage from the prophet Isaiah written as a result of an experience of exile. On Easter Day there is no longer exile or slavery, the exile and slavery that in the time of Jesus the religious and civic powers held the people within. The exile and slavery of never feeling good enough or of having the human resources to make a change, to start again and to have real hope. To have hope such as that articulated by Martin Luther King of being Free! Free at last! Hope for reconciliation between people such as sustained Nelson Mandela in his prison cell.

Early in the morning of Easter Day we find that it is Mary Magdalene who is the first person to comprehend what is going on. In John's Gospel the encounter in the garden between Jesus and Mary draws on verses in Hosea (6:1-6) and of the symbolism of the Temple. And key to our interpreting this passage, the realisation that people were now finding their way back to God, being filled with God's love, alert to how God loves and how this love reconciles people and all creation.

The Gospel writer interpreting the ancient story of the garden of Eden that ended with people living in exile as having been transformed by the hope of new life which Mary and the other followers come to share. The Gospel writer highlighting that the barriers that bring people into exile with each other such as greed, selfish pride, bitter rivalry have been transformed by Jesus through his commitment to God, his love of stranger and enemy as well as friend and transformed by the laying down of his life for others.

In John's narrative we also find Jesus saying to Mary "Do not touch (hold on to me)" which seems curious. (see Titian's *Noli me Tangere*) There are many interpretations of the passage but perhaps most convincing is recognising how radical the response of Mary will come to be. Not clinging on to former ways of relating but instead living in the present, acknowledging the great change and so preparing for the future.

The pandemic of Coronavirus means that all of us are living with restrictions on our way of life as we respond to it locally, nationally and globally. "Do not touch" is part of our necessary social isolation helping to prevent the spread of the virus. And as we face this crisis in our communities, people are responding by finding helpful practical actions, kind words, appreciative applause for those working in the health service and care workers. All these things recognising the vital response of human care especially for those who are most vulnerable. And on Easter Day we can respond like Mary reflecting on our own best hopes and aspirations, enabling qualities of patience and kindness to flourish and so ourselves helping to transform for the better the part of the world in which our actions can make a difference.