

## Easter Day John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

Christ is risen, Alleluia! The day of celebration, miracle and unfettered joy is once again upon us as Christians. The celebration begins, though, not with what was seen, but with what was not seen, what was missing. The women, we are told, including Mary Magdalene, go to the tomb after the sabbath to finish embalming Jesus' body, but when they arrive the tomb is open and Jesus is not there. The absence of Jesus' body is not in and of itself a cause for celebration, it may have been taken away to cause further hurt and humiliation for his followers, but no one, it seems, knows where the body is.

If the Romans had taken it, surely they would be displaying it as a means of demonstrating their control and authority on this situation, not arguing amongst themselves about where the body might be. If the disciples had taken it, they would not have kept up their rouse for very long, particularly after they began to be martyred for refusing to deny the resurrection. Yet none of this was known in that garden, early in the morning on the first day of the week. The women were confused, Mary Magdalene was courageous enough to ask the only other person who was in that graveyard, the gardener perhaps.

She needed to know where the body was, she had a task to perform and a promise to keep, that precious perfume that had anointed Jesus' feet in life was to be kept safe in order to anoint his body after death. Mary was ready to do it, she needed to do it, but where was Jesus' body? When we need help, we should be confident to ask for it, Mary asked the man, where have you taken him? But he did not give an answer, he just revealed to her the truth, he said, 'Mary' and she knew who it was.

Whether she hadn't recognised him before or his identity was hidden somehow from her, we cannot know, but that voice and the way he spoke her name made all things clear. Peter and John had also been in the garden, looking for Jesus' body upon hearing that it was missing from the tomb, but Jesus did not at that time reveal himself to them, their time would come. For the first encounter with the resurrected Jesus, it would be a quiet moment, just Jesus and Mary, a woman who had faithfully followed Jesus and enabled he and his disciples to live during their period of itinerant ministry. She was a woman of means but living in a society where her testimony on any matter was worthless, she could not, as a woman, even be a witness to a crime as no court would accept a woman's evidence.

Yet, here was the person to whom Jesus revealed his risen self, this was the person Jesus chose to be the first witness and to whom he entrusted the message that what was once dead is now alive, what was thought to be lost is found, the temple that had been destroyed was now on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day rebuilt. Mary was to be the witness to all of this, just as the stone which had been rejected by the builder was to become the cornerstone, so this woman who was of no consequence in society was to be the primary witness to God's truth.

And this is the truth, that God so loves the world that Jesus, co-eternal word of God incarnate, not only came to be an example and teacher of God's will for humanity, but also willingly gave his life that we might all understand that God is beyond what we see and try to control, God is beyond our understanding of time, the universe and everything. God is almighty, powerful, omnipotent, omniscient and yet intimately concerned with us, loving us, rejoicing with us in our triumphs and mourning with us in our sorrows. The truth that Mary carried that 1<sup>st</sup> Easter morning is the truth that continues to astonish and sustain us throughout our Christian journey, that we are loved by God who conquered death and rose again from the grave so that we would truly understand how powerful that love is, it is unstoppable.

The love we receive from God is not dependant on us or anything we do or say, it is given freely to us as we are, whatever our failings or flaws. It is the same love that surrounds the most powerful heads of state and the lowliest person sleeping on the street. It is the love that cannot be earned or bought, it cannot be withdrawn for making a mistake, it is the love that will be given to those we love and those we find impossible to love, we cannot control the recipient of it any more than we can understand how we became such a recipient.

The truth of God's love is lived out as we behold the empty tomb, it brings to focus the meaning of all the parables and miracles for which Jesus was responsible. The seed that needed to die in the earth for new life to grow from it, the faith smaller than a mustard seed that could make the impossible occur, the son who drifted far from his father only to be welcomed home with rejoicing, the sick and sorrowful made well, the dead raised to life. The act of resurrection makes sense of all that has gone before, restores relationship between humanity and God, and offers the hope we all carry and share through faith that with God nothing is impossible.

As we celebrate this Easter today and we break open the symbolic gifts given in the shape of eggs, may we see in the hollow of the egg, the hope, joy and love that spilled out of that empty tomb and further, like Mary, may we take this hope, joy and love and be witnesses to it in all we do and say.