

With Mary in the Garden - Easter Day 2020
An act of devotion for an individual or family group

Opening words and reflection from John 20 (*say aloud or read*)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to the other disciples and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'



Let us use the words of John and the picture to imagine we are approaching the empty tomb with Mary, seeing the stone rolled away...

What are we feeling and thinking? Despair? Fear? Frustration? Confusion? Wonder? Hope?

Let us keep a few moments of silence as we bring ourselves to God to worship...

Prayer of approach, confession and worship (*to read quietly or aloud*)

Risen Lord Jesus, we thank you, that as our Sovereign addressed the nation this week, bringing strength, unity and resolve to our communities and the nation, so You, our Risen King, stand among Your scattered flock to bring Your reassuring and gathering love to our troubled hearts.

We confess that, like Mary and the other disciples, we are prone to self-reliance: our best laid plans to tend to your broken body are thwarted by the new purposes of Your resurrection.

We confess that we are prone to despair: when things can't get any worse, we find the tomb empty and the focus of our living is thrown into confusion.

We confess that we are prone to wonder; we search in vain for Your presence in the midst of our calamity. We don't know where You are, so we don't know where to put even ourselves

And yet, in the face of an empty tomb, are we prone to hope? Are you close at hand? Closer than we might realise?

We hear a gardener speaking gently and calling our name. Are You there in the people around us who serve us at this time? Are You there beside us when we are most alone, in Your risen power?

As You call us by our name, we hear, we open our eyes and we respond, with Mary, in worship to You.

Song (to sing or recite)

Led like a lamb to the slaughter in silence and shame,
There, on Your back, You carried a world of violence and pain.
Bleeding...dying...bleeding...dying.

*You're alive, You're alive, You have risen, Alleluia!
And the power and the glory is given, Alleluia, Jesus, to You.*

At break of dawn, poor Mary, still weeping she came,
When through her grief she heard Your voice now speaking her name.
Mary...Master?...Mary!...Master!

*You're alive, You're alive, You have risen, Alleluia!
And the power and the glory is given, Alleluia, Jesus, to You.*

At the right hand of the Father now seated on high
You have begun Your eternal reign of justice and joy.
Glory...glory...glory...glory!

*You're alive, You're alive, You have risen, Alleluia!
And the power and the glory is given, Alleluia, Jesus, to You.*

Praise from Jeremiah 31, 1-6 and Colossians 3, 1-4 - (to read aloud)

Let us remember what the Lord did for His people in exile:

At that time,' declares the LORD, 'I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people.'
This is what the LORD says: 'The people who survive the sword will find favour in the wilderness;
and I will come to give rest to Israel.'

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt.
Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.
Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit.
There will be a day when watchmen cry out on the hills of Ephraim,
"Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God."

Let us remember what the Lord did for us in Christ:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Gospel Reading - John 20, vv 5-7 (to read quietly or aloud)

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. They saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Then they went back...

Now Mary was still standing outside the tomb crying. 'They have taken my Lord away,' she sobbed, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' Then, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus. He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, Jesus said to her, 'Mary...'

Thought (to read quietly or aloud)

How will you remember this Easter? Will it be the fact that we did not have a Sunrise service, or that we weren't able to get together to decorate the cross or that we did not share with our ecumenical partners the walk of witness. In these uncertain times we will all recall the Easter event for us differently. I remember seeing a cartoon of Jesus talking to four of his disciples and he said to them: "Now, I want you to make a note of this so that we don't have any duplication..."

And to our surprise -The resurrection accounts in the four gospels have similarities and differences.

They are similar in three ways

- (1) In each case the event is on a Sunday morning (two days after the crucifixion),
- (2) Mary Magdalene is present at the tomb,
- (3) And the tomb was found to be empty.

But there are differences.

- (1) In the Synoptic Gospels the women arrive at the tomb early in the morning, either at dawn or after the sun had risen. In the Gospel of John it is still dark.
- (2) There is a difference in the number and names of women present (except that Mary Magdalene is present in all four accounts). In Matthew's account there are only two women (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary); Mark names three; Luke names three and adds other and John has Mary Magdalene alone.
- (3) Finally, there is a difference concerning the placement of the stone at the doorway of the tomb. In three of the gospels the stone had been rolled away prior to the approach of the women. Matthew's account is the exception. There an earthquake takes place, and an angel descends from heaven and rolls the stone away after the women arrive.

Matthew's account is the most dramatic of the four resurrection narratives. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb. The earthquake takes place, and the angel rolls back the stone. As a story, the stage is now set for a marvellous event. We might expect Jesus to rise and come out of the tomb (as Lazarus does in John's Gospel). Yet that does not happen. The resurrection has taken place already, while the tomb was sealed. The transformation of the physical to spiritual body has taken place

The angel commissions the women to tell the disciples of Jesus' resurrection and to let them know that they shall see him in Galilee. This is anticipated by the promise of Jesus himself in, and it is fulfilled. The risen Jesus appears to the two women as they are on their way to tell the disciples. This is actually a strange turn of events. The angel has just commissioned them (28:7), and now Jesus blocks their path. They recognize and worship him. The reason that they take hold of his feet might simply be a gesture to assure them that he is not a detached spirit, but the actual Jesus. These women are the first witnesses to his resurrection. The words "Do not be afraid", recall the words of the angel. Then Jesus himself commissions the women to inform the disciples.

In conclusion, linking back to the differences – here are the things for us to focus on:

- (1) Christ is risen from the dead is central. It is at the core of our belief as Christians. We may have disagreements about many things, but this is at the heart of our faith.
- (2) The commissioning and promise of the angel in 28:7 and of Jesus in 28:10 that his disciples are to go to Galilee, and that there they will find the risen Christ, is important, and it is important yet today. Since Galilee is seen as the "doorway to the world" as seen in the thinking of Isaiah, Jesus, and the Gospel of Matthew, the light is then for the whole world, not just the Jewish people, not just the original disciples, and not just for us. It is to be taken to the world. God seeks to have fellowship with all people, not just us.
- (3) Jesus makes use of us as flawed people in his mission. He wants the disciples to know that they will meet him in Galilee. What is so amazing about that is that Jesus thereby forgives them for their failures. He even calls them his "brothers". They betrayed him and deserted him at the time of his trial and death.

But now he restores them. And so it is with us. We are like the disciples. We are flawed and we may not have got it right as individuals and as a church. But Jesus continues to call his disciples to follow him into the world and to represent him. So when you make that call to see how your neighbour is doing, wish then a Blessed Easter and share the joy of Easter as Christ is risen, He is risen indeed. **Amen**

Prayers for our world (to say aloud after a moment of quiet reflection)

Lord of Resurrection,

We proclaim with joy Your reign over human failings, suffering and even death itself

On the day of Your rising You overturned the priorities and agendas of this world and brought the reality of a new Kingdom

We bring our lives and the life of this world, Your creation, under Your reign - for we are no longer living for ourselves but our lives are hidden with Christ in God

Lord of life, when Your Kingdom comes, new life will appear like new flowers in the time of spring

Lord You are, by your tender mercy, our Dayspring from on High - so, as we proclaim your resurrection, we pray for the new creation, the new world, which will rise from our current suffering and dying

A world where creation enjoys a Sabbath rest of peace

A world where families have time to love and nurture

A world where we prize the low-paid and those who serve us

A world where we love our neighbours in community

A world where we spend money on the things that matter

A world where gangs stop feuding and feed the poor

A world where nations are too busy caring to fight one another

A world where we have time to be still and at peace

But Lord, we are not there yet - so we continue to pray for you to give:

- Inspiration and resolve to our Queen and our Prime Minister, praying for his health and recovery
 - Resource and protection to the poorer nations of the world
 - Help and hope to all who face financial difficulty, unemployment and loss of businesses
 - Perseverance and equipment to all who work in our emergency services and our health services
 - Knowledge and insight to those who are researching a cure for the virus.
 - Wisdom and strength to those farming, delivering and providing food, energy and essential supplies
- Resurrection life and watchfulness to Your people

Risen Lord Christ, give health and healing to all who are unwell, faith and confidence to all who are fearful, help and support to all who are in need, for we ask these things in Your name, praying as You taught us:

The Lord's Prayer (say aloud)

Song (to sing or recite)

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son; endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won;

angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away, kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb; lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;

let the Church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing; for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting...

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life; life is naught without thee; aid us in our strife;

make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love:

bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above....

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.

Blessing (say aloud - it is in the third person to make it a corporate prayer)

Lord of the cross - Lead us to life, in the new world You are creating

Lord of the empty tomb - Lead us to our life, hidden with Christ

Lord of my life - Lead us into Your Kingdom by the Holy Spirit

So may the blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with all His people, now and always...