

12 April 2009 Easter Sunday Sermon 'Resurrection is a gift to be lived'

John 20:1-20 *The Resurrection of Jesus*

I just love the drama in this gospel story.

Here it is, Easter day and Mary has gone to the tomb of the dead Jesus. She finds it empty and Simon and John have come and confirmed Jesus' absence.

While the other two disciples tear off, Mary remains in the garden, weeping the loss of Jesus. She is distraught and confused – the last few days have been horrific. Jesus whom she believed was destined to be so significant has been killed and now his body has gone missing.

She looks up and Jesus is standing there – but she does not know it's Jesus. She assumes the person standing there in the garden is the gardener. He engages her, asking why she is weeping.

Mary reveals the reason: she has lost something, she has lost that which symbolises all that she seems to have left of her teacher and friend: Jesus' dead body. It has gone missing and she wants to get it back – although she does not face him, Mary pleads that this gardener might know something about how she can reclaim the body.

And it's this moment that I love especially: Jesus simply calls her name – MARY!

I can imagine that in that split-second moment she hears the familiar voice; that voice that had spoken so many times over the years with love and wisdom and compassion – the voice of her friend and teacher calling to her in intimacy using simply her name.

Mary spins around instantly recognising the risen Jesus standing before her. What a moment!

Mary encounters the wonder of the resurrected Jesus.

It is this wonder which we ourselves enter into today.

We are confronted with the joyous encounter of the risen Lord. How do we understand the resurrection life of Jesus today?
What is the meaning of Jesus' resurrection for us?

Advanced theological speculation, mixed with a dash of Greek dualism, has tended to risk leaving us with a restricted sort of misty-spiritual concept, or merely something metaphorical.

Mind you, so does popular imagery of easter eggs and bunny rabbits – general symbols of fertility and life suggest a generic renewal of life; a seasonal regeneration.

Both these ideas are far from the promise of resurrection life proclaimed in the New Testament!

The resurrection of Jesus brings not regeneration but transformation; not an abstract metaphor but God's vibrant presence.

We must reclaim the 'bodyliness' of the resurrection of Jesus.

The bodyliness of the resurrected Jesus is an availability of the Son of God. He is here with us. This one who was taken, sentenced to death, beaten and left to die on the cross – is here with us again. He has made himself available.

Yet his bodyliness is a transformed bodyliness.

Jesus says to Mary: "Do not hold onto me".

Jesus is resurrected not resuscitated – things are not back they way they were; this is something totally new.

Jesus is alive, but in a whole new way. His words to Mary are part of showing her this new way.

Jesus is alive to all those who knew him before, but also alive to everyone.

Because of his resurrection, Jesus is available in a new way.

He is available to Mary, and the disciples,....

but also to Paul, Timothy,

the church in Corinth,

and even the church of St John's in the City today.

Eugene Peterson suggests that clinical descriptions of resurrection life as abstract concepts fail to see the resurrection as an open door through which the risen Christ comes to us.

The life of the resurrected Jesus springs up in our midst; it emerges among friends in an unpredictable way.

It is confusing and bewildering – just as it was for those first disciples. The risen Jesus startled Mary and transformed her understanding, and he does the same with us.

Resurrection life is not an intellectual concept to be grasped but a gift to be lived.

We are likely to miss this gift, just as Mary did at first, if we remain focused on our losses. The resurrected Jesus is ready to engage us, calling us by name to lift our heads and take in the resurrection life he extends to us today.

We, the resurrection community, are those who have heard the Good Shepherd call us by name. Like Mary, we have been embraced in the divine resurrection life and commune with God who has freely made himself available. We know the loving tones of his voice. These loving tones of Jesus call are trustworthy and lead us onward. Again, like Mary, we do not stay holding onto Jesus, but are compelled to spread this resurrection life with others.

We appreciate anew the beauty of the world,
the creativity around us,
the friendships we sometimes take for granted,
the spontaneity that can be encouraged,
meals shared at which Christ is the host.

And so, as the resurrection community we come now to that meal which stands at the centre of our life together, the meal that is enabled by God's hospitality and which is truly for us today transformation-by-resurrection. We encounter the bodyliness of the resurrection of Jesus at the table together.

The risen Jesus is available to us, he has made it so.

By enabling us to share in his resurrection life and thereby the life of the Trinity today, we are being transformed toward the promise of life that God has in store for all of creation.

The bodyliness of the resurrected Christ will be here among us in matter of moments... His very body is made available to us in earthly elements of bread and wine.

His resurrection life is shared with us, transforming us into...the body of Christ. We receive Christ's body in communion and by doing so are renewed as Christ's body. This truth is indicative of the dynamic generosity of God's resurrection life – it flows powerfully wherever the Spirit wills.

The risen Jesus meets us here, sharing his resurrection life with us all.
Hallelujah!

Amen.