

St. Mary's Sermons

John 20:1-8

Easter Sunday

16/4/17

As Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are leaving the tomb having laid Jesus body in it, Nicodemus remarks to Joseph, I'm surprised that you have given your family tomb away, no worried replied Joseph it is only for the weekend.

It had been the most dreadful few days ever in the life of Mary Magdalene, and now at the dawn of the first day of the week she is weeping at the tomb of Jesus. On Maundy Thursday, we thought about how to pray when everything conspires against us and on Good Friday we looked at the important question of why God does not always answer our prayer. These same questions must have been running through Mary's mind as she went to the tomb on that first Easter day. How was she going to deal with the overwhelming sorrow of the untimely death of her close friend? Why have her hopes and dreams come to nothing? Where on earth was God when Jesus lay in the grave? In deep trauma Mary comes to pay her last respects and it is through her tears that unexpectedly she sees the answer to all her prayers.

Mary was one of only five people that we know who had been at the foot of the cross when Jesus died. She had stayed right to the bitter end and when Jesus body had been taken down from the cross she had followed and saw where Joseph of Arimathea had laid his body. As soon as the Sabbath was over she returned to the burial garden only to discover that the body of Jesus was missing. This latest discovery must have only served to compound her grief and raise even more questions in her mind.

How poignant it is that the first person to see Jesus after the resurrection does so through tears. And perhaps it's the tears or perhaps it's the twilight or simply the impossibility, humanly speaking of what she is witnessing but when Mary first sees Jesus she mistakes him for the gardener.

The first words of the new covenant are a question. Not an announcement, nor an answer, but a question addressed to a weeping woman, why, asks Jesus, are you weeping? And for anyone like Mary and for us too, who have followed Jesus through the darkness of Maundy Thursday and the despair of Good Friday to reach this garden tomb, it is a stupid question. But it's also a profound question and, with hindsight, even a funny one. Jesus, the God who may be confused with the gardener simply speaks Mary's name and instantly she knows that her master is no longer dead. Easter dawns with a question and a name.

It is interesting to note how many times after his resurrection Jesus introduced himself to people by asking them questions. Good Friday had left a mess and Jesus was systematically dealing with the consequences of the ensuing chaos in the lives of his friends by provoking them to respond to his presence. Jesus question to Mary, why are you crying targeted her pain. Jesus loved Mary too much to leave her for too long in the pain and confusion, he wanted to help her to deal with the disappointment of the events that had taken place; to transform the tears of pain into tears of joy.

The greatest miracle in the world- greater than any healing or any revelation- is the grace which is unleashed by a life refined through suffering. It is a grace that was first released when Jesus encountered abandonment and death so that Mary Magdalene and millions of others since might receive a living hope that can no longer die.

Finally, we see the reason why Jesus did not get an answer to either of his earlier prayers. Finally, the silence from heaven is broken in a very dramatic way. Finally, Jesus prayer from the cross at least is answered. God had a much bigger, better plan; defeating satan and the salvation of the world. Had God answered Jesus prayer and taken the cup of suffering from Jesus God's rescue plan for the world would have failed. We would still be lost in our sins, with no hope of eternal life. Through his death, God was finally righting Adam's wrong. God could not possibly have answered Jesus second prayer either; the sheer weight of sin that Jesus was bearing on the cross meant that his father could not even bear to look upon him. The eternal relationship between God the father and God the son, which had existed from before time was broken. The death of Jesus shows us the full extent of God's love for us.

Perhaps unanswered prayer has caused a crisis of faith. I want you to imagine Jesus standing in front of you asking you why you are doubting. Tell him and listen for his answer.

Jesus says to all of us this morning why do you doubt my love for you? What is stopping you believing in him? Stop doubting and believe.