

**EASTER 04042021** *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Isaiah 25.6-9; Ps 118.1-2, 14-24; Acts 10.34-43; 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. 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.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 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. 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.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 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.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). 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."'* 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.

Christ is risen- alleluia, alleluia!

He is risen indeed- alleluia, alleluia!

The New Testament reading today is taken from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and we heard some of a speech given by the Apostle Peter. He was preaching the Good News, telling people about Jesus of Nazareth- the same Good News we continue to tell today.

You may remember Peter as the man who told Jesus off when he started warning the disciples that he was going to be arrested and executed; the same Peter who denied knowing Jesus after the arrest happened; the same Peter who was nowhere to be seen while Jesus was hanging on the cross.

Peter can preach the Good News of forgiveness because he has received forgiveness himself- he knows, deep down inside, that he is forgiven and his loving relationship with Jesus is more than restored.

Then we heard the story of the first Easter, as told in John's Gospel. The first person to come to Jesus' burial place, in the dark of early morning, was Mary Magdalene.

When she saw the tomb open and empty she ran to Peter and another, unnamed disciple: 'the one whom Jesus loved'. These two ran back to see for themselves. They found no body- as Mary had said they would; they only saw the linen cloths in which Jesus had been wrapped.

The writer notes that the disciples did not yet understand that Jesus would rise from the dead- even though he had told them.

They went back home, but Mary stayed, crying and mourning, just as she and other women had stayed with Jesus as he died.

When she had another look inside the tomb, she saw two angels who weren't there before. They asked why she was weeping; I wonder what she thought? 'Why am I weeping? Why do YOU think? The man I have followed and loved and cared about, the man we all thought was going to change everything, the best man who ever lived- he died! I watched him die!'

She turned away, half-blind with grief, and there was someone else standing there. He too asked her why she was weeping, and who she was looking for. Mary didn't recognise him and thinking he might be the gardener asked him if he had moved the body, and would he tell her so she could take care of him. Then Jesus spoke her name.

All he needed to do was say her name and Mary knew it was Jesus. He was different, somehow; and he had been dead, but now he was alive- but it was Jesus, it was really him!

Jesus told her to go and tell the disciples, and she did. I imagine she wanted to stay with him and ask him all kinds of questions as the reality and the enormity of what and who she was seeing sank in; but Jesus asked her to go and tell the others, and she did.

The word 'apostle' means 'one who is sent', and so Mary Magdalene is known as the Apostle to the Apostles, sent by Jesus to tell them the Good News.

We know little about her, although she is named in each of the four Gospels and all of them state that she was one of the women who travelled with Jesus and the Twelve around Galilee, who provided for him from their own money.

All of them name her as one of the women who stayed and watched as Jesus was crucified and died. All of them place her at the tomb, early on Easter morning.

In Luke's Gospel we read that she had been healed by Jesus of demon possession, which may have been what we would now know as mental or physical illness.

We know that she apparently came from Magdala, on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee- that's why she was called 'Magdalene'; and that's really all we know.

She was the first person to see the Risen Lord. And she was a woman.

Women were less than second-class citizens in first-century Judea, and this is reflected in the gospels as many of the women who encountered Jesus are not named. Their names were not thought to be important. But Mary Magdalene could not be nameless or ignored because of the important place she has in the resurrection narratives.

The witness and testimony of women didn't count for much either, back then; and still today many women are not heard, not believed, and their experiences not counted.

We know how important our names are to us. People who are imprisoned and given numbers instead of names experience it as de-humanising and humiliating. As human beings we need to be known by our names, to be recognised as unique and of equal value to all others.

When Jesus spoke Mary's name, she recognised him, and understood that he knew her.

God knows each of us by name and calls us into Easter community. God longs to embrace and enfold us into the eternal company of heaven.

Easter is about new life, new community, and new beginnings. It doesn't matter whether you are young or old, new to faith or a mature believer, there is always an invitation from our risen Lord who knows our names and all that we are. May today be a new beginning for us all.