

## 20180401EasterDay\_Sermon A Renewing image of Jesus

*"They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him"* John 20:13

Firstly, let me say to you all. "Happy Easter" may this Eastertide be a time of joy and celebration as we celebrate the fact that through Christ's resurrection we are new people who have been given new life, resurrection life.

All four Gospels give slightly different accounts of the discovery of the Resurrection. We are in the year of Mark but the John account is given as an alternate reading for today. In John's version we have Mary Magdalene coming to the Garden and finding the stone moved from the tomb. Fearfully she goes and fetches the others. They all rush off to the tomb in the Garden and find it empty and not understanding what had happened the disciples return home but Mary stays on. She sees two angels sitting in the tomb speaking to them she gives what I have made my text this morning. *"They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him"*. With tear-filled eyes she turns around and sees a man – actually it is Jesus but she does not recognize him, thinking he is the gardener. Only when he speaks and says her name – "Mary" does she respond.

I want to explore this failure to recognize the risen Lord. It occurred in Mary's life and too often it occurs in our lives too. In Mary's life we can name a number of reasons for this failure to recognize him. Speaking scientifically or psychologically we could say she was in a state of grief and shock and wasn't expecting to see Jesus who she herself saw die on the cross. Her eyes must have been filled with tears – John tells us that she stood weeping outside the tomb and "as she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb." It must be hard to recognize anyone through tears stained eyes. At the early 7:30 service the choir sung an Easter Carol translated from the German expressing this. *Magdalene cease from sobs and sighs, Wipe the tear drops from your eyes... Now thousand times may'st thou rejoice... Banish'd afar is grief and pain, For Jesus Christ the world has freed, triumphing over death, indeed, Alleluia!*

Can we recognize a person when our mind is telling us that he is dead and our eyes are brim full of tears? How often have you failed to recognize someone or fail to be recognized by people? This often happens when we see that someone out of context - for me parishioners often ignore me in Pick 'n Pay or Checkers because I'm not wearing my clergy collar – I'm out of uniform and thus out of context. I experienced this "out of context" phenomenon a few weeks ago when unexpectedly my son came out from the UK to help celebrate his Gran's birthday. I was at my computer when my daughter and her husband arrived with him. As he came passed the study door he said: "Hi Dad". I thought immediately, "Oh yes, it Nicholas" and said, "Hello" but then I thought, "Hang on, he's not supposed to be here!" He was a very welcome 'out of context' guest at his Gran's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday.

Being **not** recognized can be irritating because it means our friends are relating to our outward self and not our true inner self, which has not changed at all. For Mary it required Jesus to say her name before she clicked and made the connection that this person she thought was the gardener was in fact Jesus, her Lord.

But there is an alternative and more spiritual reason for Mary's confusion. Mary had a certain image of Jesus. That image and Mary's concept of Jesus was shattered when he was taken away and crucified. He was their leader, their rescuer, their redeemer, their saviour and to them the Messiah. Mary must have felt desolate and alone. This is way we should have felt yesterday – Holy Saturday - as we mourned the death of Jesus. Unlike Mary though our situation contains the irony that we know what will happen – she didn't. It is a pity our Holy Saturday's have merely become a good chance to stock up and shop or to run the Two Oceans Marathon between the sadness of Good Friday and the joy of Easter Day. It should rather be used for us to feel the desolation that Mary Magdalene must have felt as she came to the Garden.

How often haven't you been to a funeral and heard the eulogy describing the deceased as if he or she was a saint? Isn't that such a human fault – we remember only the good about someone after they die. That's what Mary did and so when she saw the risen Lord her image didn't match the reality and hence *"They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him"*

What was exciting in Mary's case is that Jesus came looking for her. Yes, Jesus came looking for her! Once he had found her, Mary had to let the old image she had of Jesus die and she had to let the new image develop. Then she could respond – *Rabboni – Teacher* – and then she wanted to reach out and touch – to hug him.

What is our image of Jesus? Are we in the same situation as Mary? Yes, we are. We all have a certain image, concept, idea of what and who Jesus is. Like Mary as we live our lives that image dies in us and like Mary a new image arises. This is not a once off event it happens again and again as Christ reveals himself to us. It is not Jesus that dies but merely the image, which we make of him that dies and an image displaying the new life has to be formed within us.

This is not an easy thing. After all the scriptures talk about Jesus, yesterday today and forever **always the same**. Yes, Jesus is the same. But **we** are not and **our image** of him has to change. Our image of Jesus is what gives us security, makes us feel safe in a troubled and fast-moving world. And suddenly it is not there and we feel desolate and alone. Then we become like Mary, *"They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him."* But as in the case of Mary, Jesus comes looking **for us**, he **finds us** again and we come to realize that it is not that Jesus has died, but only our **idea** of Jesus, and we have to make a new image. And let me tell you today, that new image too will disappear sometime in the future. We will be saying again and again as we live our lives, *"They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him"*

Shortly we will be renewing our Baptismal vows. Through our baptism we are identified with Christ. As one image of Jesus dies, we feel lost and desolate, but he comes and finds us as he did for Mary. We must be willing to scrap our image of Jesus and move on to the next one and scrap that one and move to many successive images of Jesus until we come to the blessed vision of Christ the Lord when we see him face to face.

This to me is the message of Easter. Yes, Jesus is the same yesterday, today, forever. But the Jesus we have known today is merely **our** image of him and we must be **found** again and again by him – as he found Mary lost and desolate in the Garden. And when he calls us by our names we must respond like Mary did – willing to accept the new image and all successive images of Jesus until at last we can greet him face to face in the heavenly kingdom. So like Magdalene *cease from sobs and sighs, Wipe the tear drops from your eyes... Now thousand times may'st thou rejoice...Banish'd afar is grief and pain, For Jesus Christ the world has freed, triumphing over death, indeed, Alleluia!*