



Sunday Reflection

Easter Sunday



in the Charges of St Margaret, Renfrew
& St John, Johnstone

For Sunday 12 April 2020

Easter SUNDAY

while all Church worship in the buildings is Suspended



Reflection for this week's Gospel

"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." John 20.18

An Illustration to set the scene

For many of us, young and older, Easter wouldn't be Easter without a chocolate egg. But did you know that we nearly missed out on chocolate? When Christopher Columbus brought cocoa beans back from the New World, nobody knew what to do with

them. They didn't look very exciting, and they were discarded as useless.

Some years later, the Spanish explorer, Cortes, tasted chocolate as a drink at the Aztec court of Montezuma and managed to acquire the secret recipe. For over a century, Spanish monasteries had a chocolate monopoly, processing cocoa beans as a drink.

Even when the secret leaked out, manufacturing problems had to be overcome before anyone developed chocolate to eat, rather than drink. But all the obstacles were cleared in time, because people with names like Cadbury and Rowntree had faith in the product. At Easter especially, it's somehow appropriate that those unlikely-looking cocoa beans should have a new life, transformed into something as wonderful as chocolate!

Looking at the words of the Gospels

Like the chocolate pioneers who had faith in their unlikely product, Mary Magdalene believed in something even more unlikely: that her teacher and friend Jesus had risen from the dead. John's Gospel tells how she was the first to discover the empty tomb and the first to meet the risen Lord, who calls her by name and sends her to tell the good news. All four Gospels credit her with being a first witness to the Resurrection.

According to the various accounts, Mary, alone or with other women, came to the tomb on Easter morning. In every account, they find the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, and angels tell them the Lord is risen. In all except Luke's Gospel, Jesus himself appears to Mary.

And the substance of the message, from the angels or from Jesus, is to go and tell others. Easier said than done. This was long before the movements of the 20th century with "women's lib", or even votes for women, let alone women priests. As in so

much else, Jesus led the way in treating women as equals to men. Often in the Gospels we read of him talking to women in the absence of their husband or father. He discusses matters of faith with women. All completely unheard of then, in a society where women weren't even allowed to testify in court because they were considered unreliable witnesses.

Isn't it wonderful, then, that God chose a woman to be the first witness to the resurrection? An unlikely choice, and for centuries the Church in a male-dominated society struggled with it. Without any real biblical evidence, Mary was branded a reformed prostitute, a woman with a sinful past. She became a representative of sinners, rather than of women. Even if true, what encouragement that must be for all of us, sinners! Male or female, we too can be forgiven for sins if we follow Jesus, and have new life in him. And whatever our faults, we who have met the risen Christ in our own lives, we whom Jesus calls by name in our baptism, can also go and say, "I have seen the Lord."

Regardless of gender or background, thanks to Mary the first seeds of the Church were sown. And although there were still many problems to overcome, the good news eventually spread to all corners of the earth. She was sure of what she had seen and knew how important it was to tell others, however difficult it might be.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives

Unlikely as it seemed, those ugly cocoa beans that some wanted to throw away held the secret of chocolate. It took people with faith in its potential to turn it into the global product it is today. Much more importantly, the man executed as a criminal on Good Friday held the secret of eternal life. That too seemed unlikely. That too needed people to have faith. People like Mary Magdalene, like the first disciples, like Christian men and women through the ages. Like us.

Far more so than the manufacture of chocolate, the Church has always faced huge problems, but will come through them because Easter is more than a chocolate feast. It is a Jesus feast, the most important festival in the Christian year, when we remember with joy the resurrection of Jesus, who died for the sins of the world and rose to bring us new life. All part of God's loving plan for our salvation. Who will you tell? Male or female, we may think ourselves unlikely ambassadors of Christ, but we have the example of Mary Magdalene... and chocolate.

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Keep you eye on the website for other services and reflections I manage to put up on our website to help us keep a good Eastertide season together, even though we are lone and at home.

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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