



Sunday Reflection

Season of Easter

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 4 April 2021

Easter Day

Today is a day of great joy. Christ is risen! He is alive and always with us. Nothing can ever separate us from his love, not even death, for Christ has brought us life eternal. So let us come together and celebrate this happy day.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

John 20.1-18

1 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. 2 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.' 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes. 11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 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. 13 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.' 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 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.' 16 Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). 17 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."' 18 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.

"She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'" John 20:13b

An Illustration to set the scene

A 2017 BBC poll claimed that a quarter of people who consider themselves Christians do not believe in the resurrection. However, many of those who have taken the time to study the resurrection stories have been convinced by them. Frank Morison, for instance, did not believe Christ rose from the dead and set out to write a book about Jesus' last days which rejected this miraculous event. However, when he actually looked carefully at the Gospel accounts, his mind was changed, inspiring him to write instead his famous apology for the resurrection, *Who Moved the Stone?*

More recently, investigative journalist Lee Strobel began looking into the claims of Christianity after his wife came to faith. He was an atheist but talking to biblical scholars about evidence for the resurrection was the key factor in changing his mind about Christianity and he, too, came to faith.

Belief in the resurrection is not foolish. Indeed, today's reading from John's Gospel offers us many reasons to believe that Jesus really did rise from the dead.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

John's account contains vivid details that are likely to have come from eyewitnesses, adding weight to its authenticity.

For example, we are told that the beloved disciple outruns Peter and gets to the tomb first, probably because he is younger.

We are also given the actual Hebrew word that Mary Magdalene uses to address Jesus, "Rabbouni", and very precise details about the cloth that had been around Jesus' head: that it is rolled up separately from the rest of the grave clothes.

The people in the story come across as authentic characters, too, which fits with what we know about them from elsewhere.

Peter, impulsive as ever, rushes straight into the tomb, while the beloved disciple holds back.

Mary Magdalene's deep attachment to Jesus fits with Luke's account that Christ healed her from some terrible affliction, having cast seven demons out from her. The description of her behaviour seems very authentic, for it is what would be expected of someone in deep distress. All she can do when talking with the angels, and even Jesus himself, is repeat the same concerns she expresses to the disciples, about wanting to know where her Lord's body is, unable to focus upon anything other than her fear that grave robbers have stolen his remains. She also stays beside the tomb weeping even when the disciples return home. Her tears may obscure her vision, contributing to her failure to recognise Christ.

Then there are the details that would surely not have been included if the story was invented. The future leaders of the Church are described as not understanding the scripture that

Jesus would rise from the dead, hardly a glowing description of these pillars of the faith.

Also, as a woman's testimony was not taken seriously back then, it is unlikely anyone would invent a story in which the first witness to the resurrection was a woman.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

These details encourage us that there are good reasons to believe in the resurrection. Christ's appearances cannot simply be explained away as hallucinations, for instance, as witnesses find the tomb empty.

Neither has the body been stolen, for the cloth that covered Jesus' face is neatly rolled up, not dishevelled as would be the case if the tomb had been ransacked by grave robbers.

And what other explanation could there be for the transformation in the disciples?

They are described in our passage as neither expecting the resurrection nor understanding Christ's teaching about it, yet in Acts we read that these timid, unbelieving men went on to preach the resurrection to thousands and were convinced enough to risk their lives telling others about it.

It's important to know we have good reasons for our belief in the resurrection, for it is central to our faith.

It means that Jesus was who he said he was: the Son of God.

It shows he has power over both sin and death, bringing us forgiveness and life eternal, and it means that Jesus is still alive, living with us here and now, so we are never alone.

May we all then be able to proclaim with confidence this Easter, our second COVID Easter: Christ is risen!

"She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'" John 20:13b

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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