



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

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



For Sunday 17 April 2022

Easter Day

God calls us by name, seeking our recognition. Let us acknowledge God's presence in our hearts and lives, and worship with praise and thanksgiving.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"She... saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus... Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him..." *John 20:14-15*

An Illustration to set the scene

Jim suffers from an intriguing condition called prosopagnosia, which means that he has trouble recognising faces.

He and his wife, Sue, live and work in London, and one day they had agreed to meet at midday by *Nelson's Column* in Trafalgar Square to go for lunch together.

Sue had a hair appointment beforehand, but arrived first. She saw Jim approaching, then watched in amazement as he looked straight through her and walked past.

She ran after him, calling out, "**Hey – Jim! I'm your wife, remember?**"

For a moment Jim looked confused, and then light dawned.

“Oh – it’s you!” he said. **“Why didn’t you tell me you were going to the hairdresser this morning?”**

The change of hairstyle had rendered the face of Sue, his wife of thirty years, temporarily unrecognisable to him.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Today’s reading from John’s Gospel falls into two distinct halves, and **Mary Magdalene is the link between the two.**

The first half is full of frantic activity, sparked by her early-morning visit to the tomb, and finding the stone rolled away.

She runs back to tell Peter and the other disciple, **“the one whom Jesus loved”**, and immediately the two men hurry to see for themselves.

They enter the tomb, but see nothing but discarded linen wrappings.

They then return home, leaving Mary at the tomb, weeping.

Two characters – **angels** - in white appear to Mary as a sort of advance guard to the appearance of Jesus himself.

They offer no explanation about what has happened, and their function seems to be to ask just one vital question:

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

Lost in her grief, Mary doesn’t appear to be startled by the appearance of the angels, but answers in the only way she can: **“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”**

Immediately the angels are forgotten as Jesus appears behind her, although she does not know that it is him.

Jesus repeats the angels’ question before focusing Mary’s attention more closely: **“Whom are you looking for?”**

Mary answers this helpful stranger, thinking him to be the gardener.

It may seem strange to us that she, face to face with Jesus, completely fails to recognise him; it is only when Jesus calls her by name that joyful recognition dawns.

But this failure to recognise is a common feature in the Gospel accounts of the disciples' early meetings with the resurrected Christ.

In John 21, Jesus appears to the disciples on the beach just after daybreak, but the disciples do not know him.

Similarly, in Luke 24, when Jesus accompanies two unnamed disciples on the road to Emmaus, it is only when Jesus breaks bread for them that they recognise their travelling companion.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

There is a richness of teaching to be drawn from this passage, but two points will have to suffice here.

The first concerns **the virtue of patience.**

Peter and John ran to the tomb and, having seen the discarded grave clothes, ran home again.

Would they have seen more if they had, like Mary, remained at the tomb?

Obviously we can never know for certain, but what we do know is that by staying there with her pain and confusion, rather than running away, Mary was shown something beyond her wildest imaginings.

Jesus was alive!

When we experience pain, our natural instinct is usually to try and run away from it.

But this passage encourages us to resist that temptation and stay with the pain, because only then will we be able to see the deeper purposes of God working through it.

Secondly, there is the question of non-recognition.

It simply didn't occur to Mary that the man standing behind her could possibly be Jesus, so she failed to see what was right in front of her eyes.

Our faith teaches us that Christ is everywhere – but how frequently do we, too, fail to see the Christ who is reaching out to us?

We are challenged to seek him continually, even in the most unlikely places.

How often do we fail to recognise him in the people and the situations we meet day by day, even when – as with Mary – he may be hidden in plain sight?

“She... saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus... Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him...” *John 20:14-15*

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 some folk are not able to meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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