

**St Andrew's and St George's West
Order of Service, 9th April 2023**

'The Day that Changes Everything'



Gathering music

Introit: Jesus is risen, Alleluia! Hymn 409 selected verses

Welcome

Call to worship

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Darkness has been vanquished!

The brilliant light of hope has come!

Come, let us worship and celebrate the Good News!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Amen!

Hymn 410 Jesus Christ is risen today

Opening Prayer

Sovereign, living God

On this Easter morning, we come together, though in different locations, in Christ's name to worship you. Graciously hear us as we pray. We come with awe and wonder, with gladness and celebration. As we lift up our voices in praise, so we lift up our hearts, our thoughts, our souls, recognizing afresh all you have done for us in Christ. Speak to us again today, O God, through all we read and sing, all we hear and do.

We thank you for this Easter Day, this day of resurrection, that changes everything – not least the way we think, the way we act, the way we live. Help us to rejoice in the message of this day – the Good News at the heart of our faith – that Jesus who was crucified in weakness on Good Friday has on this day been raised in power: the message of light after darkness, joy after sorrow and good after evil. We thank you for the victory of a love that cannot be defeated whatever it may face.

As we confess our sins and failings this morning, our unworthiness of your love, we pray that you will in grace receive us, cleanse and restore through the love of Christ, and strengthen us through the inner power of your Holy Spirit.

When life seems hard and we are in danger of being overwhelmed by trials and temptations, when the innocent suffer and evil prospers, teach us to trust your love and purpose, knowing that whatever we face, however things seem, your will shall be done and your kingdom come, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So our Living Lord, breathe new life into our hearts this day, transform us on the inside, fire us with new confidence and hope, fill us with resurrection power, and grant that we may meet and walk with the living Christ, offering him our joyful, faithful service this and every day, for his name's sake. **Amen.**

And so we gather up all our prayers in the words that Jesus himself taught us:

**Our Father in heaven.
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us in the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

Sharing the Peace

The peace of Christ be with you
and also with you

Hymn 433 Haven't you heard that Jesus is risen?

Scripture Readings (NRSV)

Colossians 3: 1-4

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Anthem *The strife is o'er* Henry G. Ley

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. 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 toward 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's 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? Whom are you looking for?" 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 touch 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.

Hymn 436 Christ triumphant, ever reigning

Sermon *The Day that Changes Everything*

Hymn See what a morning, gloriously bright Keith Getty and Stuart Townend (*Songs of Fellowship 4*)

See what a morning, gloriously bright
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
Folded the grave-clothes
Tomb filled with light,
As the angels announce Christ is risen!
See God's salvation plan, wrought in love,
Borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man, for He lives,
Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping: 'Where is He laid?
As in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;
Hears a voice speaking, calling her name:
It's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!
The voice that spans the years,
Speaking life, stirring hope,
Bringing peace to us,
Will sound till He appears,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
Through the Spirit
Who clothes faith with certainty,
Honour and blessing, glory and praise
To the King crowned
With power and authority!
And we are raised with Him,
Death is dead, love has won
Christ has conquered;
And we shall reign with Him,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

Prayers of the People

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. **Amen.**

Hymn 19 Ye gates, lift up your heads on high

Unveil elements.

INVITATION

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.

What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

Psalms 116: 5, 12, 13

Let us celebrate this joyful feast.
People will come from east and west and north and south,
And sit at table in the kingdom of God.

Luke 13:29

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Lord's Prayer

The Lord is here.

His Spirit is with us.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is our duty and delight, always and everywhere, to give you thanks and praise, Almighty God, eternal and holy Father. You created the heavens and the earth; you made us in your image; and in countless ways you show us your mercy. For all your goodness to us, known and unknown, we give you thanks with the Church universal, and with the whole company of heaven we praise you in the angels' hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might

Heaven and earth are full of your glory

Hosanna in the highest

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

We bless you for the gift of Jesus Christ.

Born of Mary, **he shares our life.**

Eating with sinners, **he welcomes us.**

Dying on the cross, **he rescues us.**

Risen from the dead, **he gives us new life.**

By the presence and power of the Holy Spirit bless and consecrate these gifts; so that the bread which we break may be for us a sharing in the body of Christ, and the cup which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ, for the forgiveness of sins and the hallowing of all our lives and work.

Receive us, O God, as, together with our praise, we offer to you our very selves.

And now, as Jesus taught us, we say:

Our Father in heaven

hallowed by your name, your kingdom come,

your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Holy Communion

We do this as Christ appointed. On the night he was betrayed, he took bread (*the minister takes bread*) and, after giving thanks to God, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is broken for you; do this remembering me.'

In the same way he took the cup (*the minister raises the cup*) and said: 'This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do it remembering me.'

Jesus, Lamb of God

have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins,

have mercy on us.

Jesus, redeemer of the world

grant us peace.

(The minister gives bread)

Take this and eat it: this is the body of Christ which is broken for you. Do this remembering him.

(The minister offers the cup)

This cup is the new covenant sealed by Christ's blood which was shed that the sins of many might be forgiven. Drink from it, all of you.

(After all have received)

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. (*Cover elements*)

Prayer

Great is the mystery of faith

Dying, you destroyed our death

Rising, you restored our life

Lord Jesus, come in glory

Remembering all the witnesses and martyrs of the faith and in communion with our sisters and brothers who have fallen asleep in Christ.

Gracious God, You have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth. You have fed us and renewed us for service.

Help us, who have shared Christ's body and blood, to be his faithful disciples, so that our daily living may be part of your kingdom, and our love be your love, reaching out into the life of the world. **Amen.**

Hymn 419 Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son

Sending and blessing

May the glory of this Easter Day bring peace and joy to you and those you hold most dear.

With the risen Jesus always at your side, look forward to tomorrow in faith, hope and love (knowing that every day is Easter).

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you this day and for evermore. **Amen.**

Sending music

Worship Leader: Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison

Scripture Reader: Charles Bergius

Prayers: Michael and Jocelyn Cunliffe

Organist/pianist: David Stewart

Sources:

Scripture reading(s) taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

All hymns from Church Hymnary 4th Edition unless otherwise stated

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Sermon *The Day that Changes Everything*

Prayer: Open our ears, O Lord, to hear your word and know your voice, as did Mary at the empty tomb. Speak to our hearts and in the power of the risen, living Christ may we serve you, now and always. Amen.

‘Woman, why are you weeping? Who is it you are looking for? (John 20: 15)

There’s a French proverb that says: [*La vie est comme un oignon qu’on épluche en pleurant*] ‘Life is like an onion, which one peels crying.’ [1]

From the vantage point of this Easter Day, we look back over recent times in which the observation of that proverb seems to find ample justification. – from the miserable months of Lockdown, to the horrors of the war of aggression in beautiful Ukraine, to the cost of living crisis at home, in which increasing numbers are worried sick about their families, too often having to decide whether to heat or eat. In mentioning these tragedies, we only scrape the surface of the woes of suffering and weeping humanity.

Yet we are here gathered, as Easter people, to celebrate the ultimate symbol of hope, renewal and new life, which is the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we’re in Spring now! [2] As Martin Luther King once said, ‘Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.’

John wants his readers to appreciate that the hope-filled message of the empty tomb becomes meaningful only in the context of a weeping world – a world beset by darkness, sin and death.

Twice over, at Jesus’ tomb, Mary is asked, ‘Why are you weeping?’ (vv. 13, 15). The new Gaelic translation of the New Testament captures well the stronger sense of the original Greek: *Carson a tha thu a’ caoineadh?* – ‘Why are you wailing?’

For Mary herself, it was perfectly obvious why. She has lost the love and light of her life. Mary, from Magdala in Galilee, had found in Jesus unqualified forgiveness and deep spiritual healing. She became one of a small group of women who ministered practically to Jesus and his disciples in their many travels. She had witnessed at close quarters the terrible events of Good Friday and had accompanied those who carried Jesus’ body to the garden and tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. For Mary, it was all a living nightmare. Her world had fallen apart. A future without Jesus is unthinkable. What was there to do but to weep and wail?

With consummate artistry, John has crafted this narrative so as to convey to us the *radical nature* of what is happening. We’re at a pivotal moment in the whole course of history, he wants us to know. [3] It represents nothing less than the beginning of new creation. But here’s the tension and irony in six words: *Jesus has risen. Mary is weeping.* Everything has changed but Mary is living a Good Friday existence in an Easter-created new world. She doesn’t yet realise, in Paul’s words: ‘The old has gone. The new is here’ (2 Cor. 5: 17). We’ll return to this in a moment.

Firstly, let’s notice that the deep tension is there in the narrative from the beginning. Mary’s journey to the tomb begins on the first day of the week (referring to resurrection Sunday), ‘while it was still dark’ (v. 1). That last observation is unique to John’s gospel. Now, in a Hebrew context, the ‘first day of the week’ is also a reminder of the beginning of creation

(just as the opening words of his gospel – ‘in the beginning was the Word’ - are an echo of the first verse of Genesis). For John, the resurrection of Jesus represents a completely new beginning – nothing less than a new creation. Yet, just as in Genesis, before God’s creative Word said, ‘Let there be light,’ the whole was covered with darkness, so on this day of new creation begun, Mary’s horizons remain shrouded in darkness and gloom.

She reaches the garden tomb **[4]** and to her dismay and grief she finds the tomb has been opened, the stone rolled away. Apparently without looking in, she concludes that this is a criminal act, committed by some dastardly grave-robbers who have by now done who know what to the body of Jesus.

Mary rushes back to tell Peter and (probably) John what she had discovered. They, in turn, run to the tomb which they find to be empty, apart from, to their astonishment, the strips of linen in which Jesus’ body had been wrapped, together with the cloth that had been wrapped around his head. Unsurprisingly, they didn’t know what to make of it all. They came away in complete puzzlement.

Cutting such an unhappy, lonely figure, Mary made her own sad way back to the tomb. She was standing there in the garden with tears falling from her eyes when something impelled her to have a look into the tomb. To her utter shock what she saw were two angels dressed in white, sitting where the body had been. ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ they asked. We’re intended to get the irony of Mary’s response: ‘They have taken away my Lord,’ she said, ‘and I don’t know where they have put him’ (v. 13).

The dramatic irony continues. Mary turned around from the tomb and saw standing in the garden a figure she did not recognize. Her welling tears certainly didn’t help her to see him clearly. He asked her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Who is it you are looking for?’ (v. 15)

[5] Mary assumes him to be Joseph’s gardener and asks if he has removed the body for some reason, and, if so, please to tell her where he is.

You see how John takes us back again to the first creation story. There’s a man and a woman in a garden. God is the Gardener who creates the Edenic paradise, symbolic of the whole creation. And now, on this first day of the week, as Mary meets the risen (though still unrecognized) Jesus, we’re meant to join up the dots and think, ‘This is all about new creation; about Paradise restored; about new life embodied and embedded in the Great Gardener, the risen Jesus.’

As GK Chesterton saw so clearly, we all somehow sense that this present broken world, with its violence and hatred, its tragedies and evil is not ‘normal’. **[6]** Deep down we retain the primal memory of a world where all is *shalom*, love and joy – what Chesterton beautifully called the ‘buried sunrise of wonder’.

And now, at last, for Mary, the transforming moment of recognition dawns. It comes as Jesus speaks her name, oh so tenderly, so lovingly: ‘Mary!’ (v. 16). In a flash, she knows exactly who the supposed Gardener is.

Jesus, the living Word speaks her name, as he can speak ours, in a way no one else can. He does so when very shortly he will act as our Host at His Table. He speaks our name, not to accuse or condemn, but lovingly to forgive and heal and wipe the tears away. As Augustine said, He ‘loves each of us as if there were only one of us’.

[7] Beside herself with joy, Mary could only manage to utter one word, recorded for us in her native Aramaic: 'Rabboni!' meaning, 'My teacher!' (v. 16).

In a moment her world is right-way-up again. And yet for Mary, as we now see, it simply cannot be the same as before.

It appears she bent down at that point and took hold of Jesus' feet. Jesus' reaction might appear somewhat harsh: 'Do not hold onto me,' he said (v. 17). What did he mean? Jesus' next words make clear exactly what he meant.

His thoughts are on the next great moment of salvation history – his ascension to the Father (both his and his people's Father). No longer will he be physically visible and present to his followers. It's as if he's saying, 'You'll have to get used to that, Mary. Your relationship with me will be as real – more real - than ever it was, but its context will be completely new – as new as new creation.

And it will be enjoyed not only by you and some folk from Galilee and Judea but by millions the world over and down the generations of time. For that ongoing mission you must release me, Mary. Release me to ascend to the Father in order to lift you and countless others higher. Don't look for me at the tomb. **[8]** I'm not there. The way out of the darkness of sin and death for you and for all is by moving ahead into my resurrection light and life. I am going to ascend to the glory for you and send the Holy Spirit so that the truth about me become limitless joy for you and for all who believe.'

Mary was convinced. Her tears were dried. She returned to the disciples with these simple, profound words of witness: 'I have seen the Lord' (v. 18).

So today we are invited to pause, with Mary, before the mystery and glory of the resurrection. We know many are weeping on this joyous Easter Day - maybe not always literally, but on the inside. You may be one of them. But Easter doesn't happen in a bright airy church, even one as beautiful as this – it happens in places of deepest darkness, of human sin and sorrow and death.

So here we are in the garden with Mary. And for us, too, the Gardener has a question – two, in fact, and they're closely linked. 'Why are you weeping?' and 'Who is it you are looking for?' The key to dealing with the first is to be able to answer the second. It echoes the very first question asked by Jesus in John's gospel, addressed to two of John the Baptist's disciples: 'What do you want?' What's your quest? (John 1: 38)

The answer to humanity's – our - deepest needs, the healing of our sorrows, the forgiveness of our sins, the goal of all our yearnings is found right here, in the person of the crucified, risen Christ. **[9]** He promises to all who seek and follow him pardon, peace, security, eternal life and unending companionship. Recognising, trusting the Gardener, we shall rise because he has risen and he is with us always.

Mary's weeping, and ours, ceases in the presence of the resurrected Christ as, in accents of infinite, compassionate love, he calls us each by name: 'Mary!'

Malcolm Guite has a poem which, I think, beautifully expresses the message of our text. I close with this:

He blesses every love which weeps and grieves

*And now he blesses hers who stood and wept
And would not be consoled, or leave her love's
Last touching place, but watched as low light crept
Up from the east. A sound behind her stirs
A scatter of bright birdsong through the air.
She turns, but cannot focus through her tears,
Or recognize the Gardener standing there.
She hardly hears his gentle question 'Why,
Why are you weeping?', or sees the play of light
That brightens as she chokes out her reply
'They took my love away, my day is night.'
And then she hears her name, she hears Love say
The Word that turns her night, and ours, to Day.
Amen.*