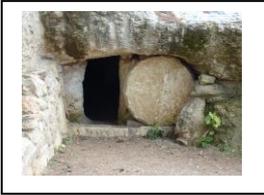


## Talk on Easter Morning 12th April 2020, 10.15am (John 20:1-18)

Nothing hurts more than losing a loved one. Mary Magdalene could no longer stay away from the tomb - at least to be near him! Jesus. So many hopes, all crashed. But something was wrong:



The huge stone was rolled away from the tomb's entrance, somebody must have stolen the body! She ran and brought Peter and John, but that didn't help her, the two men simply went home after they had a look, and she remained at the tomb, the empty tomb, weeping, so immersed in her grief, that she did not recognize the two figures in white as angels, and talked to them as if it was a normal thing to talk to angels. Veiled in tears, she hardly

looked at the other stranger, her only focus was this tomb, empty, so utterly empty - she felt she had lost everything, and then one word, that pulled her instantly out of her misery: "MARY!"

This is one of the most moving scenes ever in the story of humankind, and it is this scene, we need to focus on, when we feel overwhelmed by grief and desolation ourselves.

Quite understandably, when in sorrow, we are mostly focussed on ourselves: *our* loss, *our* loneliness, *our* desolation. It is natural and necessary, but essentially, we are weeping for ourselves. Just like Mary at the tomb. And just like her, our tears make us deaf and blind to the glory of heaven.

"Mary!" Imagine that moment. When you feel all is lost, and then Jesus calls your name, lovingly. "Hey, you...!"

He knows all your sorrows, he has endured them himself, he has wept and cried and died, but now all is changed: HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! (Picture 'Noli me tangere' by Fra Angelico on screen)

Jesus has overcome death! Now we have proof: Death is not the end, it is a new beginning.

Mary wants to hold on to Jesus, embrace him, never let him go again, but no: things have changed. Jesus holds her off, lovingly, but firmly. He is not for her to have, not for any single person. He says: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father." In the emotionally charged state Mary is in, she cannot comprehend what Jesus just said. All the way through the Gospel, Jesus had been talking about HIS Father, now he talks about 'my Father, and YOUR Father', and he calls his disciples not friends, but BROTHERS. Why? Because something has fundamentally changed: We are ONE family now! This is the start of the new creation! Where things are finally right again! (Picture of 'Earthrise' on screen)

Oh, we all wish. This encounter at the tomb changes us all, makes us the Christians we are, but when we turn back to our reality, the world is still devastatingly the same. And so vulnerable out there flung into space. We feel powerless in the face of evil and destruction, and a pandemic that sweeps the planet.

But amidst this desolation, we can hear Jesus calling: "Hey, Sister! Hey, Brother!" And deep in our hearts we know: There is hope. But on a condition: "Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them!" We are not meant to cling to Jesus and keep the good news to ourselves: We are now one family on this planet! Or do you see any borders on this picture?

Nothing has brought this more forcefully into view than the Corona crisis. Much of the world has come to a standstill, and finally, people are thinking about the things that really matter. And do not think we Christians have all the easy answers!



Ruth Valerio, the author of our Lent book says: *"We tend to read the Bible as if it was only about people."*

There it is again, the focus on *ourselves, our problems, our grief*, just like Mary.

In truth, we are just one part in the whole of creation, and we have severely violated the trust put in us.

So let us turn around like Mary, look at Jesus and lift our eyes to the new reality He has brought in: Destruction is not the end, death is not the end, there is a new creation, and today is the eighth day of it!



Sunrise over the Sea of Galilee, a new day dawning, new hope. And I wonder with the lyrics of the famous song 'Jesus Christ Superstar': Why did Jesus come at such a backward time to such a strange place? If he had come today he *'would have reached a whole nation, Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication!'*

Because Jesus' story is not about big shows and manipulation: It's about RELATIONSHIP. Jesus wants a personal relationship with each one of us, you and me, and every person on the planet, through all the ages. Remember how lovingly He calls: "Mary!" Imagine that moment. When you feel all is lost, and then Jesus calls your name, lovingly. "Hey, you...!"

And new life rushes through your veins, resurrection life.

Let us respond to His call, let us live lives full of care for our neighbours, humans and animals and plants alike. Let us live restoring lives, so that resurrection life comes to others, and the whole creation. AMEN!