

**Dawn Vigil Sermon**  
**31 March 2024**

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*John 20.1-8*

*Open our ears, O Lord,  
to hear your word and know your voice.  
Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills,  
that we may serve you today and always.  
Amen*

Sometimes just hearing your name is enough.  
Sometimes just hearing your name is *everything*.

Think of Mary Magdalene, out there in the garden,  
in the dark before dawn.  
And think of all that she has *lost*.

The first thing she remembers about Jesus

is the day he healed her.

People said she had seven unclean spirits inside her,

but all she knows is that she used to feel tormented, *all the time*,

and that she was kept, *all the time*,

in her parents' house, in Magdala, on the shore of Galilee,

locked away to keep her safe,

but also to keep her from *shaming* herself - *and them*.

Locked away, that is, until Jesus came through the village

and her parents risked bringing her into public,

and bringing her to him - and she was healed.

And that might have been it. That might have been enough.

She had been released from her captivity,

and she would always have been grateful,

but she could have received that gift of healing

as the gift of a normal life;

she could have gone back to her parents' house,

and eventually, perhaps, to a *husband's* house,

and enjoyed the gift of having been made *normal*,  
having been made acceptable, respectable and *decent*.

But Mary *chose a side*,

and she chose differently.

She chose to tie her fate to Jesus,  
and she left with him and his disciples.

She gave up *everything* for him.

She gave up the chance of a normal life.

She gave up the security of her parents' home.

In effect, she gave up her parents –  
she has not seen them now for more than a year,  
and she does not know if they will take her back  
if she tries to go there now.

She gave up the money – the not inconsiderable money –  
that was her birth right and should have been her dowry,  
laying it all at the feet of Jesus and his disciples,  
helping to fund their mission,  
to pay the costs of their march upon Jerusalem.

And do you have any idea what else she gave up?

In her society, at that time, as an unmarried woman,  
travelling openly with all these men,  
all these *not very reputable* men, who weren't her relatives,  
without a father or a husband to be her chaperone?

Do you have any idea what people have been calling her,  
what people have assumed about her?

She gave up any possibility of being respectable;  
she became an *outcast* for him;  
she became *indecent* for him.

She chose sides, and the side she chose was the side  
of the marginalised, the excluded, the despised, the poor –  
the side that Jesus had chosen.

And she did it all because she believed in him,  
She believed in the revolution he promised;  
she believed he would turn the world upside down;  
and she believed that she would be there with him  
when the hungry were filled,  
and when mourners laughed,

when the meek inherited the earth,  
and the poor became rulers in his kingdom.

Mary chose sides, and she chose Jesus' side,  
because she believed that he was on God's side –  
and that God was on *his* side.

She believed that God would grant him the victory,  
would allow *her* to share that victory,  
and that she would have her reward  
for all that she had given up.

And now Jesus was dead,  
and it had *all been for nothing*,  
and she was left with nothing but her empty purse  
and her indecency,  
nothing but a reputation that she knew she would never shake.  
There was no point holding on to a hope  
that she would ever find her way back  
to a normal life, to decency, to the respect of those around her.

God, it turned out, was not on Jesus' side after all.

God was on the side of the executioners.

God was on the side of power.

God was on the side of the rich who kept on getting richer.

God was on the side of the comfortable and

against the marginalised;

on the side of the respectable and against the indecent.

God was not on Jesus' side,

and God was not on her side.

She had been wrong about Jesus.

She had been wrong about his revolution.

She had been wrong about God.

She had been wrong about *everything*.

Until – as the sun came up  
and began to warm the garden – she heard her name.  
She heard the gardener say, ‘*Mary*’.

And when he said that, she did not only hear her name.  
She heard much more than just her name.

The gardener said, ‘Mary’,  
and *she* heard him say, ‘You were not wrong!’

‘You *are* not wrong.’

You did choose the right side,  
the side of life,  
the side of justice,  
the side of victory.

You were not wrong,  
you *are* not wrong –  
you *chose well*.

The gardener said ‘Mary’, but she heard a *vindication*.

The gardener said 'Mary',  
and *she* heard him say, 'God is *for* you, not against you.'  
She heard him say, 'God is *for* the powerless,  
*for* the excluded and those on the margins,  
*for* those who mourn and those who are hungry,  
*for* the indecent and the despised,  
*for* the tormented and the hopeless.'

God is on their side,  
God is on *your* side,  
God is on Jesus' side,  
and God has *always* been on that side.  
God has always been a God of love and justice.  
God has always been for you and not against you.  
That is who God *is*.

The gardener said 'Mary', but she heard a *revelation*.

The gardener said 'Mary',  
and *she* heard him say, 'The revolution is not dead.'  
She heard him say, 'That story is not over.  
The world *will* be turned upside down,  
the hungry *will* be filled,  
the mourners *will* find joy,  
the meek *will* inherit the earth,  
the poor *will* be granted the kingdom -  
and you *will* be there with him when it comes.  
This revolution has not been buried.  
She didn't hear him say *when*;  
she didn't hear him say *how*;  
But she heard him say, 'The kingdom of God *is* coming.'  
The gardener said 'Mary', but she heard - a *promise*.

A vindication.

A revelation.

A promise

The gardener only needed to say her name,  
but sometimes just hearing your name is enough;  
sometimes just hearing your name is *everything*.

Amen.