

Easter Evening

Call to Worship

Leader Jesus was dead, laid in a tomb.

All: Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Leader: Morning has broken, tomb now empty.

All: Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Leader: A new day has come, life not undone.

All: Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Leader: He walks beside us, and eats with us, God is with us.

Leader: Come and worship, the Lord is here!

All: Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Jesus Christ is Risen Today <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1brSOs0IMc>

Risen Lord,

we are the Easter people, and Alleluia is our song.

We are the Easter people come to worship,
released from tombs of pain and doubt and fear and death
into the freedom of this new day, and its promise of hope fulfilled.

We are the Easter people, Emerging into the brightness of faith,
Blinking, questioning, wondering, hoping.

Come to us, into the garden of our lives, and touch all that is barren,
and wasted and dried with Your healing hand.

Forgive our half-lived lives, our broken promises, and our failed kindness.

Call to us by our name, that we might turn from all that limits and burdens us,
and lift us up into forgiveness and freedom.

Open the gateways of our hearts and minds, and call us out into Your world to be
embraced by Your unfailing and renewing mercy.

Today, in silence, prayer and song,
may we encounter Jesus and His grace.

For we are the Easter people, and Alleluia is our song.

And we pray all these things Through Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

Who taught us to pray together saying...

John 20: 1-18 The Resurrection

20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away 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 So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus^[a] head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had 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 went back to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one 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 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to

her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? ”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 Aramaic,^[b] “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for 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 that he had said these things to her.

Now the green blade riseth <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r9JK1sPB4A>

Sermon

There are many things we might never have thought of before

This time last year that now seem a bit strange.

We notice things we haven’t noticed before.

Mary says something to Jesus in the garden on that Easter morning that I had never really thought about, or paid particular attention to.

‘Noli Me Tangere’, the Latin version of Jesus’ words to Mary in the garden, translates as ‘Do not touch me!’, though ‘Do not hold on to me’ or ‘Do not cling to me’ may be more faithful to the original. This snapshot from John’s account of what happened on Easter morning has been the inspiration for numerous works of art and literature. It catches the imagination because it is at the one time so tender and so painful, a moment poised between intimacy and distance, love and loss. It could not be more relevant to Christian people celebrating Easter for the second time since the outbreak of a worldwide pandemic which has made the normal, natural instinct of human beings to touch and hold one another a source of danger, possibly even a criminal offence.

While schools have returned and we can now worship in the church buildings, life is not what used to be thought of as normal – indeed, I imagine it will be a long time, if ever, before our first response, on meeting someone we know, is to reach out for a handshake or a hug.

But there was no pandemic in Jerusalem when Mary heard her name being spoken in the unmistakable tones of her beloved teacher and friend, whom she had thought was lost to her forever. There is no need, as some have done, to invent a sexual relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, one of his most faithful female disciples, to be aware of the close bond between them. An embrace would have been the most natural form of greeting in any circumstances, never mind in this extraordinary moment for Mary of disbelieving joy. So why does Jesus respond with what must have felt like a hurtful rejection?

None of the usual reasons apply. The man who touched lepers and allowed a bleeding woman to touch him had no fear of physical or ritual contamination. Although he valued time alone, he was, unlike some of his disciples, unconcerned about people invading his personal space, and unembarrassed by displays of affection.

This encounter was different somehow, and John needs his readers to know, through Mary Magdalene, that living with the risen Jesus is not a return to the ‘old normal’ but the start of something new. If Mary had run up with arms wide open for that cuddle with someone she never expected to see again.

(or, later, Thomas who wanted to see the holes in his hands from the nails on the cross) had in fact reached out and touched him,

would they have found him to be a mirage,

or an image conjured up by grief?

Or would they have been tempted to draw a deep breath and assume, wrongly, that life would now continue as before?

John the evangelist’s explanation is closer to the second of these. Mary, according to John’s Jesus, was not to touch

or 'hold on' to him because this special time was not going to last. It was a transitional time, a brief interlude between Resurrection and Ascension, and Mary would only have to let go again if she held on too tightly to him now. The 'new normal', which John's readers were already having to live, did not include Jesus' physical presence in a recognisable, huggable human body.

For a short time, resurrection appearances would convince the disciples that he was, indeed, alive, but they must not become dependent on them. And nor must we.

Easter brings joy and hope after the long weeks of living with danger, the agony of watching a loved one suffer, and the bleak despair of separation through death. It is a fresh start, a time for celebration. But all change involves loss, and losses need to be acknowledged and grieved if they are not to fester and become lethal. Mary would carry into her post-resurrection life of continuing discipleship and leadership in the church,

the new 'body' of Christ, a sadness for what she had lost.

That would include being able to reach out and touch a 'God with skin on'.

Many of my friends have said to me that Easter is

"the perfect Sunday for the Church to reopen".

Indeed it is. It is a fresh start, a time for celebration.

But that doesn't mean that we will all go back to normal again,

Whatever that was.

We have changed.

The Church has changed.

The world has changed.

Some people may not feel safe

Coming away from home for some time yet.

For we have all had experiences

which have caused us to see things in a different way,

Some changes have been harder than others.

Some of you have lost loved ones, others have lost work,

or suffered from loneliness or depression, after months

being in isolation or separated from family.

And all change involves loss,

and losses need to be acknowledged and grieved,

but that too has been hard to do this year.

When we haven't been able to visit with friends

or many of our family in their homes,

Or help comfort someone when they are struggling in the same ways we might like to, showing up

with flowers or chocolate at the door, or even just having a coffee and a catch up or a nice meal

together.

But perhaps we have learned to look at things differently,

And in our one on one interactions, at a distance, on the doorstep,

Or even face to face through a screen,

the time we have had together has helped us to get

to know a few people better than we ever have before.

We haven't been able to give our parents and grandparents a hug for almost a year and a half, but

we have perhaps had the time to

speak to them a lot more than before,

because we have been home and had time when they were awake,

to play games together, and chat, and join in with family occasions.

Someone mentioned to me the other day how hard it is to really sense what people are feeling like,

but I find the video chats give

A good chance

There are many things we have missed,
but there are other things we have gained which will
help us in the future.

We will always remember this past year, for all the things we couldn't do, but let's try and also
celebrate all the things we could do that were different!

Remembering that While we may enjoy the hopefulness of this day we recognise that for many
people the question,

“why are you weeping?”, is very real and very present.

For too many of your beloved children,

God of new life, it does seem as though death has the last word,

as though fear can trump compassion,

as though violence is the source of true power.

This day, of all days, is the day that laughs

at those who thought that using fear, violence and death

would bring their own success and happiness.

Prayer of thanksgiving and intercession

Lord Jesus Christ,

Come, stand among us,

that we might see You by our side,

that we might hear You call our names,

that we might now, on this heady day of joy,

be still, right now, and know that You are God.

We give You heartfelt thanks from our full hearts.

We bring to You our prayers this day

For a world needing Easter.

We pray for those locked in by hurt, and loneliness and grief.

We pray for those locked in by addiction, and hunger, and poverty.

We pray that we, inspired by Your Good News this Easter Day,

may bring our practical care and help to those who call out,

and to those who are silent,

and in our lived-out faith and love, show no partiality

as we bring what hope we can to those in need.

Today we pray for our nation, for our Queen,

and for those who shape the future of our country and our world.

In times of uncertainty make us confident with kindness.

In times of frustration, make us gentle with vision.

Help us to be the Easter people bringing light into our world.

Lord Jesus Christ,

for the Church we pray, that in our work and witness

we may be generous in our believing,

and joyful in our serving, and humble in our knowledge that it is your
body, and not ours.

Help us to blend tradition and newness,

to keep our faith and work a power for good,

and a dynamic for reconciliation and renewal.

This Easter Day, this new beginning, this time of lifting up,

lift up our heads and hearts, lift up our eyes and voices,

for our Lord Jesus Christ is risen!

And there is hope!

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=En28Je8ehDs>

Reflection

A bit like the past year for many of us,
This past week must have felt like a roller coaster for Jesus' followers that first Easter weekend.
Tears of sadness lingered from the darkness, of Good Friday
To the despair and numbness of Saturday,
What are we meant to do now?
And then... dawn, light peaking over the horizon,
warmth flowing over the land, another day, walking to the tomb.
Mind set on the task, paying respects, praying for my beloved, saying goodbye.
And then...empty, stone rolled away, cloths off to one side,
shock, horror, he has been taken! Must run and tell the others!
But then... some time later, after the boys have been and gone, and I was alone once more, with
sorrow deep, and loss overwhelming, when...
A voice, calling to me, leave me be, can't you see?
And then my name... my name...
and the sun's light burst into my soul, tears filled my eyes,
and I couldn't believe my eyes. I have seen the Lord!
Light, joy, life,
a spring in my step, for all has turned to good.
All is well as the day of resurrection comes to an end.
And the world will never be the same.

The world has changed.

Thine be the Glory