

John 20:1-18

Dear friends,

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

In the early morning gloom, Mary Magdalene went to the grave where she had seen them put Jesus' body two days earlier. Because of the Sabbath, she could not come sooner. When she arrived, she saw that the stone had been moved. The grave had been disturbed.

For Mary, this must have felt unbearable. Jesus had transformed her life through his love and acceptance. If her heart was anything like ours, she must have longed to undo the last few days—to turn the clock back to when he was still alive, when everything had not yet fallen apart.

She did not go inside. Instead, she ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, assuming the body had been taken—perhaps by the same authorities who had engineered Jesus' death, preventing his family and friends from completing the rituals of their grief.

Peter and John raced to the tomb, 'running together'. John arrived first but hesitated. Peter went straight in. The body was gone—but not as though stolen. The burial cloths lay neatly in place, as if the body had passed through them. Then John entered. The gospel says, "he saw and believed." What he believed is left unsaid. The two men went home, leaving a weeping Mary behind.

At last, she bent down and examined the tomb, which was probably like a low cave. Where the men had seen absence, she saw presence: two angels, sitting where the body had been.

They ask her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

Why indeed? Many of us know what it is to weep at a grave. Mary's sorrow reaches across the centuries—touching our hearts with her hurt, loss, confusion, and emptiness.

"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

"My Lord." Not a title of power, but for her, a term of love. She wants Jesus. She wants her final goodbye. More than anything, she wants life to be as it was.

Still trapped in grief, she turns around and sees Jesus standing there—but does not recognise him. Sorrow has fixed her gaze on the past. She is not ready for the present, let alone the future.

Again the question comes:

"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

She pleads with him through the tears that have blinded her, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." She is facing the grave, not the living Christ.

Then Jesus speaks one word.

"Mary."

That is all it takes. Again she turns—and this time she knows him.

Her reply is recorded not in Greek, but in her everyday language: "Rabboni!"—"Teacher." Not his name. Not a title of authority. The word that belonged between them.

Mary Magdalene becomes the first witness of the resurrection—sent to proclaim life in a world that did not value her testimony. Not Peter. Not John. Mary. God entrusts the greatest news in history to someone society ignored. And she still carries that message to us, just as Jesus gave it to her: “Do not hold on to 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.’”

Yes, Jesus is alive—but not as though time has simply been reversed. This is not resuscitation. He does not return to the old life. He is raised into a new one. In John’s Gospel, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost are one continuous movement of God.

Mary cannot cling to him because he is not standing still. He is moving—towards the Father whom he now calls “**my** Father and **your** Father.”

That claim is deeply radical. We can only call God “Father” because Jesus has made himself our brother. Our shared life with God is not something we reach up and seize for ourselves—it is only given through Christ, who crossed the chasm we cannot.

He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through him.

We believe that God came down from heaven to earth as a real, actual, human being, not just as a vision, a voice in our head, or a spiritual experience. The condescending, downward, physical act of God is the basis of our faith.

That is the story of the New Testament, and it reverses all conventional notions about God, religion, and humanity. Mary did not find God by looking up. She finds him standing beside her.

7 days later the disciple Thomas startlingly confessed this same Jesus to be, “My Lord and my God!”

It is normal not to recognise him at first. Mary didn’t. We don’t. But he speaks our name. And today, though we are not at the tomb, Christ meets us through his Word, and through the sacraments we are about to share.

Good Friday was a circuit breaker that stopped us in our tracks. Our Lord was dead. Easter Sunday is the other side of the same event. Our Lord is alive! Friday’s deep, irreconcilable grief has now become an unstoppable, onward journey to heaven. This is what God was doing all along.

Jesus is not gone. He has gone ahead.

And because he lives, we will follow him to our new life in God.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Amen.