

Easter.1.A.2023.04.09.Sermon (Jn. 20:1)

A. Cottrill

"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." This is our text. Let us pray: "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer, Amen"

Have you ever heard really good news, and it seemed too good to be true but it actually wasn't? It's marvellous. If you've ever watched something like antiques road show, or one of those reality shows based on pawn shops, part of the appeal is that you want to see people show up with what they assume is junk in the attic, only to find themselves fantastically rich all of a sudden.

The followers of Jesus had invested everything in him, and then when Jesus was arrested they fled and lost it all. Imagine giving your whole life to a movement and then abandoning it and thinking it was all for nothing. They were at the lowest of low places on Sunday morning. You can hear it in Mary Magdalene. She sees the stone rolled away and she can't bring herself to hope that Jesus has risen, she just stands at the tomb weeping, having lost everything.

I am a terrible pessimist and sometimes my wife will ask me what I think is going to happen, and on the wrong day I will just paint the most catastrophic worst case scenario possible and grunt that probably **THAT** is what's going to happen. I think there's a bit of that in Mary Magdalene today. She's saying to herself: well the stone is gone, so someone has stolen the body of Jesus, our teacher and friend. She's made it a worst-case scenario.

But then the angels appear and Jesus himself, risen-in-the-flesh appears to her and comforts her that all is going according to plan, that he is ready for the next step, the Ascension. And Jesus calls on Mary to do a great missionary task - can you imagine what she's called to. On Easter morning she is standing with the risen Jesus, someone back from the dead, and what does Jesus tell her - don't stay here clinging to me but rather you go and tell my disciples, my brothers

- he calls them - you tell them I'm alive. I imagine Mary Magdalene probably thought: well Lord, it'd probably be better if you did that. It'd probably have more of an effect. At least I have had that thought every time I've done a missions trip or gone on door-to-door evangelism. I've thought: Jesus if you just showed up first, then everything else would follow easy. And I think what that complain really amounts to is: 'Lord let's do away with faith, let's get rid of trust'. Humans don't do well with faith, after all, we're not inherently trusting. But what Jesus calls us to, is what God has called us to ever since the beginning. He wants us to trust in his word, he wants us to have faith in Him.

God can do miracles, he still moves stones, and Easter is the biggest miracle. Yet Mary is sent not with a miraculous sign or wonder, but with the gospel, the good news that Jesus is alive. And you and I also have been given that gospel of new life too. We are being called this morning to believe in the good news of the gospel by faith, not by sight. To trust that Christ is who he said he was, to believe Mary Magdalene, and the Gospel writer that Jesus is alive.

And it's actually such good news, it's hard for us to believe. Like finding out that old painting in the attic is a genuine Monet worth millions. Jesus' resurrection from the dead means for us that all of our sins have been forgiven, the offering worked, Jesus has defeated the Devil, and risen victorious over death and hell. That Christ has undone the curse of Adam, and that because of Jesus you and I can also rise from the dead on the last day to a blessed life without suffering, illness, or pain. That death has been defeated.

The one who does miracles, who still moves stones has touched you and I with the power of the resurrection as well already. He has given us holy baptism, and the preaching of the gospel, absolution, and the Lord's Supper. Through these means he has poured into us his life-giving Spirit which will raise us up again.

A couple of years back the National Post ran a story on the discovery of insulin for the hundredth anniversary, and how it was in Toronto after the great war that saw so much death, Canadians were able to see children and teenagers, people wasting away and dying cured. People who were carried in as skeletal figures, a short time later walked out strong again. It was so marvellous that one of those physicians wrote "I had witnessed so many near resurrections that I realized I was seeing enacted before my very eyes Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones". And in more recent history some of spoke of AIDS medicine in Africa having a Lazarus effect there in ways that seemed almost too-good-to-be-true.

The message of Easter is that the medicine of the gospel, the hope of the resurrection is assured because of Jesus Christ. Because he lives, you and I will also live eternally. It is news that seems too-good-to-be-true, but it is not. And even now the one who still moves stones, fills us with his life-giving Spirit in Word and Sacrament.

So this Easter as we sing our Alleluias in praise of the risen saviour, let us draw forth to the Lord's table, and take our medicine, receive our cure, the true body and blood of the risen Jesus, which purchased us from death and Hell, and brings us new life. Let us take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. For he has saved us, and we have been given the good news to share. We join the ranks of John and Mary Magdalene, and all who have rejoiced in the message of Easter. Jesus is alive, thanks be to God, Amen.