

Sunday, 5 April 2026

Easter Sunday Sermon

Acts 10.34-43 and John 20. 1-18

Easter always begins in the dark.

Before the sunrise, before anyone has worked out what has happened, there is a woman walking to a tomb with grief still heavy in her body.

There's the first shock this morning from John's Gospel, as theologian Morna Hooker puts it:

*'...we find the evangelist (John) boldly maintaining the scandalous primacy of a woman.'*¹

I wonder if that rings any bells with events a couple of weeks ago - when Archbishop Sarah Mullally was installed as the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury. That wasn't a scandal for me...it was a moment for rejoicing.

Back to the first Easter Sunday...we get the second shock. The stone is moved and the body is gone. There is confusion, distress and I suggest fear.

And notice the clothes in the tomb...John 20.6. the burial clothes lying in an ordered way...no thief stealing a body would do that...this is actual resurrection.

Mary is first...

...and that is not an accident. It tells us something essential about the kingdom of God. Paul, in Acts, speaks of the impartiality of God. Acts 10.35

At the tomb the good news does not arrive in predictable ways. God is the God of surprises.

Gerard Hughes the insightful Jesuit priest would say, if he was here:

*"God is not predictable... God is always new."*²

¹ Morna D Hooker - Endings - Invitation to Discipleship pp 69

² Gerard W Hughes - God of Surprises

Weeping

I think it's beautiful that the first sound Jesus makes after the resurrection is not a question of concern: "*Woman, why are you weeping?*" *John 20.15*

The first words of the risen Jesus are directed towards human sorrow.

Weeping is at the very centre of this story. Mary is weeping outside the tomb. She weeps as she speaks to the angels. She weeps even as Jesus stands before her, unrecognised. Her grief is not brushed aside or hurried along.

(I wonder when was the last time you had a cry?)

Mary does not recognise Jesus at first. She mistakes him for the gardener. That, too, matters. Jesus, alive again, is not obvious. Sometimes God is present and we do not yet see.

Jesus meets us where we are

Jesus meets Mary in her confusion and grief. He does not wait for perfect faith. He simply calls her by name: "*Mary!*" *John 20. v16* And that is enough. Recognition dawns not through argument, but through relationship.

This is how the resurrection works in these early stories, Jesus appears to people who are unsure, doubtful, mistaken. And he meets them as they are. The resurrection is not a reward for certainty; it is a gift given in the middle of uncertainty.

I can relate to that uncertainty in the life of the world today, in this City, in our Diocese and in my own vocation as your bishop. Things can be unpredictable, sometimes chaotic. That's what has me constantly turning to Jesus.

John and resurrection

For John, the resurrection moment is not separate from the rest of Jesus' life. John's gospel describes Jesus' whole life as about his resurrection and glory. For John, the resurrection is unveiling what was always true.

Light that darkness cannot overcome. A life that cannot be extinguished.

And then we hear that echo in the words from Acts: God shows no partiality. The resurrection is not for a select few, not for the especially religious or the especially certain. It is for everyone. The invitation is wide open.

Resurrection life today...

Last month I was at a launch for the work done to see just how many people in the communities around us had been positively impacted by our churches through social action - and its a big number - 41,000 people - building community, reducing isolation, supporting families, giving young people opportunities...the list is a long one.

And on one estate an example of life coming out of death? Young people hiding in vicar's garden...playing '*group hide and seek*' two summers previously that would have been gang violence...outreach, pizza, purpose, coaching, presence...a community changes, still challenge and yet the church and its people had changed things.

Life coming out of death? Resurrection life.

In my past, I met a person who suddenly started going to 8 o'clock communion. They asked if they could come and see me. They explained they were a committed atheist and a psychologist by profession. In a cathedral, like this one, they'd visited as a tourist. A ray of light came through a stained glass window and shone on a small statue. It was so beautiful and unexpected, it took their breath away. They wondered, not for the first time, 'Is there a God?'. They started coming to 8 o'clock...they'd hear words in the liturgy and they'd turn up in their week, in a crossword, in the paper, on TV...

...the person came to see me and they were scared. 'What is going on?' I gently wondered if it might be God and said so. They were open to this possibility and fear reduced and faith grew in depth and understanding...

...resurrection life?

For us?

Therefore, I wonder this morning, if resurrection life is not just something that happened to Jesus. If it is something we are all invited into—what might it look like to be resurrection people?

It is closer than we think.

Perhaps in the quiet ways we make space for one another's sorrow—and allow our own tears to be real, trusting that God meets us there.

Possible in the simple faithfulness of showing up, even when hope feels fragile—bringing what love we can, as Mary did.

I wonder if it's in those moments when something unexpected breaks through, and we begin, slowly, to recognise life where we hadn't seen it before.

It's in the ways we listen for the voice that calls us by name, often in the most ordinary of places.

Resurrection life the small, steady refusals to give in to despair—in choosing to trust.

In the generosity we already practise: the ways we welcome, include, and honour others, often without even naming it as something holy.

Perhaps Easter is not asking us to become something entirely new, all at once. Rather, to notice that this resurrection life is already stirring among us, and to lean into it more.

Easter does not begin with certainty. It begins in a garden with Jesus meeting someone with compassion.

Jesus is risen.

So let us go, like Mary, and keep living it.

Amen