

Intro to readings:

We all know the story of the resurrection. There are of course four accounts recorded in each of the Gospels.

Today we are going to hear Matthew's version.

All four gospels vary slightly in their telling of this story, but the one thing they all have in common is that Mary Magdalene was the first to experience the risen Christ and she was the one who goes and tells the other male disciples.

For far too long this fact has been diminished in the Church's liturgical telling of the story.

It is Mary who is in fact the apostle to the apostles but she has never been credited with this fact.

In a church that has been dominated by a male clerical tradition it is not hard to see why Mary Magdalene has been sidelined!

It was one of the early popes that set her up as a prostitute when there is no evidence in the Bible stories, and this was only rescinded by the Vatican in recent years...

I really want you to pay attention to Mary Magdalene as you listen to the story.

Also in this version, Matthew tells of a 'great earthquake' that rolls away the stone from the entrance of the tomb. This is a metaphor or symbol telling of God's power to roll away the stone of death.

Also there are angels with the message 'Do not be afraid'.

This is the same message given by the angel to Mary at the very beginning of the Jesus story; it is the message given to fearful shepherds outside Bethlehem; it is the word given by Jesus given to disciples on the Sea of Galilee. 'Do not be afraid'

In the scriptures the opposite of faith is fear – so here Mary, and we too, are encouraged to 'have faith' – faith in the rich love of God that overcomes even death itself.

Let us then listen to the story from Matthews Gospel...

SERMON:

I want to speak only briefly...

The story of Jesus and Mary Magdalene must be one of the greatest untold love stories of all time.

At the beginning of the week, Jesus is at a dinner. Mary herself senses that something is brewing that the powers that be are plotting and are determined to destroy this man.

In effect she gate crashes the party and with great love she anoints the head of Jesus with fragrant oil, then washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair...

...it is that same fragrant oil that she brings to the tomb this morning to anoint the body of Jesus...

These two events are like bookends to the Holy Week story...

And from that dinner Mary continued to stay alongside Jesus:

as he was dragged between Herod and Caiaphas and the crowds roared 'crucify him';

as he struggled to carry his own cross to the place of execution;

as he was cruelly nailed to that hard cold wood and heaved aloft;

as he breathed his last.

She helped take his bloodied body off the and she helped carry him and lay him in the tomb;

she saw the stone rolled across the entrance and the guards placed in position;

and then she waited as the Jewish law would not allow her to do anything considered to be 'work' on the Sabbath day, and anointing a body would certainly be considered work;

but as soon as she could, as the sun rose at day break signalling the end of the Sabbath rest Mary Magdalene was there, at the tomb, with fragrant oils to anoint her beloved.

Let us be clear, these are not the actions of an interested bystander. Indeed the stories tell us that his close friends scattered and left him to his fate.

No these were the actions of a woman in love...

It is fitting that it should be the eyes of LOVE that see the risen Christ for the first time...

for it is only by the eyes of love, by the eyes of the heart, for that is where love resides, that anyone can see these things...

it is not by reason and deduction that we can see, but by love – ‘seeing’ with the eyes of the heart.

Mary did not see a dead man walking; what she ‘saw’ was death transformed by love so that even death itself should not be feared, (remember - that is the message of the angels) for love overcomes and continues even in death...

Pause

At one am this morning I had a text telling me that my daughter had given birth to my grandchild just before midnight, at 23.23 on the 23rd!

This morning, three mothers have brought their children to be baptised...

All these women, as does my daughter, will know the love of which I am speaking; they know that overwhelming sense of connection which is totally non-rational, but is known in the warmth of the heart...

...and they know, in their heart of hearts, that this love can never be broken or lost... it may be painful at times, but it is never lost.

Pause

And this is the Good News to which all are invited...

..God’s love is available to all

and it is a love that will melt the heart; that will roll away heavy stones; that will bring joy and laughter; that will transform and make new...

Pause

I was pacing my garden at 7 am this morning trying to think of a way to end what I want to say this morning...

but there is no ending to Easter morning...

The eyes of love, the eyes of the heart, see afresh each day, for each day provides new opportunities to find and express Love....

And I as I was watching 'Praise Be' before I left for church, I heard these words of St. Augustine: *He departed from our sight that we might return to our heart and there find Him. For He departed and behold, He is here.*

Yes the greatest love story of all time....

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed. Alleluia!