

HOW Mission Community and KSAT Worship service for Easter Sunday April 4th 2021. Service written by Jacky Ousby.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

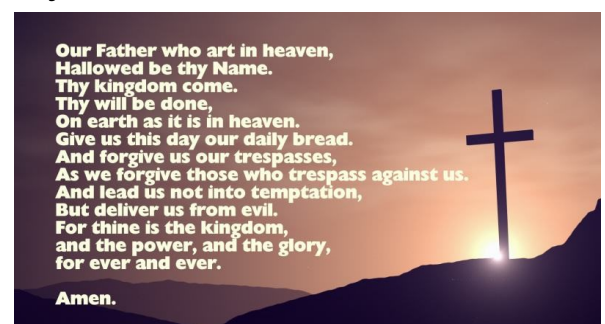
How do you feel this Easter Day? Are you in celebration mood or just going through the motions. Martin Luther King once said "Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars" but I would add take heart because no matter how thick the cloud cover we *know* with certainty the stars are still shining beyond the clouds. Our message today has both sadness & happiness in it. We come from varied lives, each with our own experiences of sadness & happiness, the ups & downs, the challenges & responses, of life. How this can all be held in God's hand is a mystery. But be assured, it is! We come with faith & hope that God does hold all things together, & that the darkness always leads to a new dawn. We will come through the darkness into the light of life as it should be, into joy.

*There is a green hill far away, Outside a city wall;
Where the dear Lord as crucified, who died to save us all..
We may not know we cannot tell, What pains He had to bear,
But we believe it was for us, He hung and suffered there.
He died that we might be forgiven, He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven, Saved by His precious blood.
There was no other good enough, To pay the price of sin;
He only, could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.
Oh dearly, dearly has He loved and we must love Him too;
And trust in His redeeming love, and try His work to do.*



Prayer

Dear God we come to praise you for loving us so much that you asked your son, Jesus to come to earth, to show us how to live, yet holy, & how to enjoy a relationship with you as Father & child. We fail to live as we ought. But thankfully that is not the end. It was your plan for Jesus to give his life as payment for all that we do wrong. We're sorry Jesus that you had to do that, but we are thankful that your death paid the debt we could never pay. Best of all we praise you as resurrected Lord; death could not keep you; you showed us there is life after death too! We have hope now & for the future. Lord, we come as children to their loving parent. We share the ups & downs of our lives with you. When we celebrate, you celebrate too. When we cry, you understand. May we know the comfort of hearing you call us by name, & when we turn towards you, we experience the dawn of resurrection in our lives. Meet us in our need & lift us up, give us courage & faith to trust you whatever happens. If we are surrounded by darkness, assure us it will not last. As we lean on you darkness fades. Light dawns. Tears of sadness are replaced with tears of joy & laughter. Holy Spirit help us to listen.



Encourage us to respond, to do your will as we walk together.

Amen.

John 20 v 1 – 18 NIV

Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone was moved away from the entrance. She ran at once to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, gasping for breath. “They took the Master from the tomb. We don’t know where they’ve put him.”

Peter and the other disciple left immediately for the tomb. They ran, neck and neck. The other disciple got to the tomb first, outrunning Peter. Stooping to look in, he saw the pieces of linen cloth lying there, but he didn’t go in. Simon Peter arrived after him, entered the tomb, observed the linen cloths lying there, and the kerchief used to cover his head not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself. Then the other disciple, the one who had gotten there first, went into the tomb, took one look at the evidence, and believed. No one yet knew from the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead. The disciples then went back home.

But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, she knelt to look into the tomb and saw two angels sitting there, dressed in white, one at the head, the other at the foot of where Jesus’ body had been laid. They said to her, “Woman, why do you weep?” “They took my Master,” she said, “and I don’t know where they put him.” After she said this, she turned away and saw Jesus standing there. But she didn’t recognize him. Jesus spoke to her, “Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?” She, thinking that he was the gardener, said, “Sir, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can care for him.”

Jesus said, “Mary.”

Turning to face him, she said in Hebrew, “*Rabboni!*” meaning “Teacher!” Jesus said, “Don’t cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I ascend to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.’”

Mary Magdalene went, telling the news to the disciples. ‘I saw the Master ‘! And she told them everything He said to her.

He is Lord, He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord.

Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess; That Jesus Christ is Lord.

He’s my Lord, He’s my Lord. He is risen from the dead and He’s my Lord.

Yes my knee shall bow, and my tongue confess; that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Thoughts on John 20

The Easter Day we celebrate began “*while it was still dark*”. This is John telling us the story in real time but we can interpret these words as “while we live in darkness” or “while we feel overwhelmed by life” as our story is still unfolding. I find that so encouraging. Although I might feel low at the moment, there is light at the end of the tunnel. This is not the end. On that first Easter morning Mary Magdalene/Mary of Magdala rose early. I wonder if she had even slept that night. I wonder if she had been thinking about her friend Jesus & going over the events of the last week. Tossing & turning. I wonder if she had been planning the day ahead. Was she tired? I’m sure she was. Tired, anxious, grief-stricken. So “*while it was still dark*” she got up & dressed & quietly left the house to go to the tomb/the grave. Was it a path she

knew well or did she stumble in the darkness? Was she crying & so her tears made the road even harder to see? Why was she going in the dark? What did she intend to do? John is a man of few words. We may presume she was going because she wanted to mourn by the graveside, to weep alone for her friend, & to pay her final respects in private. We have all experienced desolation after losing a family member or friend at some time in our lives. A person too young. A person too good. A person too kind. We may have revisited the grave to mourn, to talk to the departed but have we ever come across the grave disturbed, instead of a mound of soil an empty hole? What would you do? What would you suspect? Mary arrived at the tomb & saw the stone removed from the entrance! Mary stopped. She doesn't go towards the tomb to investigate. She runs for help! She runs to tell the news to Simon Peter & the other disciple, presumably John. It is not good news, or at least the conclusion she has jumped to is not, for she tells them *"they have taken the lord out of the tomb, & we don't know where they have put him"*. Do they try to calm her? Do they wonder if she is confused? Do they ask for more information? No, they leave her & run for the tomb to check it out for themselves.

It seems John was the faster runner, perhaps he was younger? He arrives first, the stone is rolled away, she was right there, & then he bends down to look in the tomb. He sees the strips of linen that would have been wrapped around the body of Jesus but he doesn't go any further. Was he stunned by the sight? Was he frightened? Peter, on the other hand, runs past John straight into the tomb, as usual no holding back. He sees the linen cloth too & the cloth that would have been wrapped around Jesus head, folded up separately from the other strips! How strange! No body but neatly folded cloth. Was he angry? Did he start shouting? Did he want to go fight someone? Did he want to ask questions? Have you ever heard of a tidy robber? Thieves want to be quick to avoid being caught. Who took the time to unwrap those sticky cloths from the body? Why waste time folding cloths? We have to imagine Peter's reaction at this stage (John does not record such information). John finally joins him inside the tomb & *"he believed"*. Believed what? We need to know more. Did he believe the body had been stolen? Did he believe the body had been brought back to life? Did he believe what Jesus had previously told them about being raised up after three days? No, John tells us that at that point they still did not understand that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Are we to presume John believed Mary's report that Jesus body had been taken away to some secret location? But by whom & to where? Perhaps John believed something strange was happening, although he couldn't put it into words at the moment? However Peter & John felt, or what they thought had happened, it seems they said nothing & took no action, other than simply going home. John records no emotions at what they found, no discussion about the situation, no curiosity, nothing! Not even a goodbye to Mary who had obviously followed them back to the tomb. Men!

Peter & John went home, they just walked away leaving Mary standing alone! Weeping! Perhaps by now the sun had risen but Mary was still in the dark. She was heartbroken. Confused. Sobbing. Mary's day had started *"while it was still dark"* & for many people the true meaning of Easter often begins in darkness, confusion, misunderstanding, sorrow, grief & even death. But light was about to break into

Mary's mind. First, she took a step nearer the tomb, she kneels to look inside & is astonished at what she sees. Two angels & empty cloths. John actually describes the angels, how they were dressed & where they sat, as though to prove Mary was not just imagining them. They say "*woman, why do you weep?*" – is that not an obvious question? Why do they ask it? Perhaps it was to make her think about what evidence she had for her weeping. Her response "*they have taken my master & I don't know where they have taken him*" has become more personal than when she ran & told the disciples the tomb was empty. Then it was the royal "we", we don't know, now it is "I don't know". We each have to make our own search for Jesus. No-one else can do it for us.

Next she turns & sees Jesus but does not recognise him. He appears to be a stranger, no-one she knows. She presumes he is the gardener. Perhaps the tomb is in a large garden & therefore the man would be a gardener coming to tend to the plants before the heat of the day begins. Or does she not recognise Jesus because her view is blurred by tears, her grief muddling her brain? Or was Jesus' appearance different in his resurrected body. Jesus was not just resuscitated, he had changed, truly resurrected from the dead. It explains why other witnesses of the risen Lord did not immediately recognise him too. It's a mystery I can't explain but you may want to ponder. However, it was to Mary who had wept & waited by the tomb who was the first to see the risen Lord. Do we not all have some idea of who Jesus is & what he is like before we truly know him? Some white European living in the Middle East, white robe, sandals, miracle-maker, wise man, teacher? What is it that moves us from the darkness into the light of belief; Son of God, Saviour, Redeemer, Friend? At first Jesus just calls her "*Woman*". "*Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?*" Two questions we can ask ourselves when overwhelmed by darkness. Why? Who? Why are you in this position? Who can help? Who do we seek? Why are you reading this service? What is it you want? Who can help you? Mary wants the body of her friend. What was she going to do with the dead body when she found it? Did she have strength to carry it to a safe place? Our darkness sometimes stops us from thinking logically. Her devotion however is rewarded.

"*Mary*". That's all he said. One word. "*Mary*". Her name. Immediately she knows who stands before her. It changes everything. "*Rabboni*" (Teacher)! Jesus calls each us by name. We're not just part of a crowd. We are known by name. We are individuals. Jesus knows my name. He knows yours too. Have you heard him call you by name? He is calling now. No matter how deep the darkness, no matter how shady the shadows, Jesus is calling you today, calling your name. Are you listening? Note the promise in Isaiah 43 "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; & when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*" Mary heard her name & suddenly the darkness started to lift. The tears stopped. Jesus was with her. The Bible is full of people who cried – more men than women in fact.

The Bible deals with real life! Crying is not a sign of weakness. But thankfully Christian tears are temporary once we realise Jesus is beside us, with us & for us.

Mary wants to hold Jesus, hug him, touch him. You've seen reunions at airports or train stations or on your own doorstep – big hugs, kisses, the holding of hands or arms around a shoulder. But Jesus speaks *“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.”* What is that about? Is the resurrection not complete? Is the transformation not finished? It feels like rejection! Perhaps he meant do not hold on to the Jesus you knew (the earthly man. Jesus was more than just a good man. People accept Jesus lived & was a good man. They need to accept him as the risen Lord & to do that Jesus had to ascend to his Father, he had to go full circle. “From Heaven you came, helpless babe” but you did not stop there. He lived & died but then “up from the grave he arose, victor over all his foes,...& he lives for ever” – in heaven with God his Father interceding on our behalf until we join him. He had to return to release the Holy Spirit to help us in our living. Perhaps he was saying do not cling to me for I still have things to do, places to be, people to see. Perhaps he was saying let me go. Or do not hold on to old teaching, old habits, as you are moving onto something new!

Mary was certainly about to start something new. Jesus says *“go and tell my brothers I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”* She was about to become the first evangelist. Jesus chose a woman to tell his brothers *“I have seen the Lord!”*. Did she go slowly? No, she would run like the wind. Was she still sad? I think she was laughing with happiness. The darkness had lifted & now she felt light-headed. Mary was the first witness, the first to share the good news “Jesus is alive”. She told the disciples all that he had said. She told of her encounter with Jesus, what she saw & heard, & her interpretation of it. Her testimony was personal. It was her story.

The Easter story is just part of the Jesus story, & His story continues in your story, my story. Jesus meets us in the mess of our lives. Whether we are confused, grieving, hurting, struggling, sad, unsure, frustrated, angry, lost Jesus is calling your name. When life is dark, Jesus walks with us until the light appears. Come, linger, listen for Jesus. Open your ears & your heart. Open your eyes. Jesus stands before you. Believe! What is he asking you to do? Is he asking you to share your story? You've known darkness & now you are living in Son-shine. Jesus is asking you to go & tell. The Easter story is not just for history books. It is a living experience, the story of ordinary men & women who trust in an extraordinary God.

The darkness does not last forever but while it is dark look up, & marvel at the stars. The Hands that flung those stars into space surrendered to cruel nails out of love for you & me.

Lord Jesus,
thank you for promising to be with us always. Help us to remember that promise when we don't feel brave enough to be your disciples. Help us to remember that the first people to know that you rose from the tomb were ordinary people like us,

women & men who didn't feel very brave. Give us courage to believe & to tell others – as Mary did – this Easter & always. **Amen.**

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son, Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won; Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away, Kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body lay.

*Refrain: Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the vict'ry thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb; Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom; Let the Church with gladness hymns of triumph sing, For her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting: [Refrain]

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of Life; Life is nought without thee: aid us in our strife, Make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love; Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above: [Refrain]

Let us pray:

for those who know it is Easter, but do not join in the celebration;
for those who walk in the sunshine, but cannot feel the warmth;
for those who see the flowers, but fail to appreciate their beauty.

We pray for all those in need of joy this day.

for those who see the joy in others, but look away;
for those who mourn what might have been;
for those who spoil the good things in life.

We pray for all those in need of love this day.

for those who long to step out into the daylight;
for those who want to dance in the rain;
for those who want release from their captivity.

We pray for all those in need of hope this day. Amen.

*We have a gospel to proclaim Good news for men in all the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name; we sing His glory, tell His worth.*

Tell of His birth at Bethlehem, Not in a royal house or hall;

But in a stable dark and dim; The Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of His death at Calvary, Hated by those He came to save;

In lonely suffering on the cross For all He loved, His life He gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn; empty the tomb for He was free.

He broke the power of death and hell, that we might share His victory..

Tell of His reign at God's right hand, by all creation glorified;

He sends His Spirit on His church, to live for Him the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name Him King; Jesus is Lord of all the earth;

This gospel message we proclaim; we sing His glory, tell His worth.



God of new life, new beginnings, we want to encounter again the mysterious story of life everlasting. Help us, like Mary, to stay close to Jesus, to embrace our emotions, to hear you call us by name, & to be prepared to experience new wonders.

Amen.

THERE IS A GREEN HILL

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KrtQilwjkY>

HE IS LORD

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

THINE BE THE GLORY

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

WE HAVE A GOSPEL TO PROCLAIM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5wWRYq57EM>