

Easter Day 2018 John 20: 1-18

Christ is risen! These simple words are the backbone of the Christian faith. There is no Christian faith without these words. There is no salvation without these words, there is no eternal life without these words. There is no forgiveness of sins without these words, so churches throughout the world have said for centuries this simple little phrase, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!”

On Easter Sunday, we don't say that Christ is alive. Sometimes churches have signs that say, “Jesus lives”, or something like that. Now, it is true that Jesus is alive but that is not what Easter is all about.

We are talking about the fact that after Jesus died on the cross, they wrapped his body up with cloths and anointed his body with spices. On Good Friday, he breathed out for the last time and then on Easter Sunday he sat up, stood up and walked out of the tomb. The most important thing for us to come to terms with on Easter Sunday is the simple fact that the resurrection happened and that Jesus actually rose from the dead.

Jesus is risen from the dead, he is completely risen from the dead, and nothing less than risen from the dead. Christ is risen, and in this way, and only in this way, can we say that he is alive.

When Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, the angel Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary: “Nothing will be impossible with God.” On this occasion the angel was saying that it was not impossible that Elizabeth, Mary's relative, should conceive and give birth to a son, when she had been barren all her life and now was old. It was also not impossible that Mary herself, a virgin, not having had any relations with a man, would conceive and give birth to the Son of God.

But this little motto – “Nothing will be impossible with God” – is a kind of summary of the whole of Jesus' life. Everything that Jesus says and does is coloured by these words and right up to Easter Sunday, we stand here today in the presence of God with the same motto on our lips, with God wiping all tears from our eyes, speaking our faith in the presence of God and against the world, confessing with confidence the most impossible thing that could happen: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

In our Gospel reading today from St John, we are put in the shoes of Mary Magdalene. We read: *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. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

"Without the resurrection, Jesus is not the crucified one, but merely the one who was crucified and is still dead. But since he rose from the dead, He lives as the crucified one. Jesus risen is Jesus crucified, so the church preaches Christ crucified!"

What we notice in our reading here is that Mary did not go the cross on Easter Sunday morning but she went to the tomb. She knew that the cross was empty, but she didn't know the tomb was empty until she got there. In our Gospel reading today, we notice that Mary Magdalene is crying, she is worried, she is distressed.

*She goes to Peter and John and she says: "They have taken away my Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

She brings her problems and her distress to Peter and John and what happens?

*"Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must be risen from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes."*

Notice all the detail here. The race that the disciples have, the linen cloths, the face cloth by itself, Peter looks in first and then John. Mary leads Peter and John to see what she saw for themselves. But what good does this do for Mary?

We read: *But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.* She is still crying, she is still anxious, she is still distressed and she is still without comfort. Her soul refuses to be comforted.

The apostles by themselves cannot do a single thing for her. They cannot comfort her. No amount of "cheer up", "it's all right", "don't cry" can stop Mary Magdalene's tears from flowing. It is very important how we think about Jesus here. Do we think he's just another man, like any other man, like the Peter or

John? There are plenty of people today who deny that Jesus is true God and true man in one person. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit from a virgin, he was both God and man together. If we don't believe that Jesus is truly God, then what are we left with? Nothing better than Peter or John—a man like any other man. And then we read

*“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And Mary saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”*

Later we read: *Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means teacher).*

And finally, we read that Mary's tears dry up and her heart rejoices, not only when she is standing in the presence of her risen Saviour, but when he calls her by name.

Jesus, our risen Saviour, true man and true God, our Lord, our teacher, calls us by name today. He calls us to follow him, to worship him, to trust in him. When Jesus calls us by name, and when we allow ourselves to recognise him as our resurrected Lord, then he comforts us. Jesus is the one who says, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* No human being can say this, as only Jesus can say this, only Jesus can wipe away our tears from our eyes, because only he is the Son of God. He was crucified on the cross, and only he was risen from the dead. We are in the presence of the risen Lord Jesus in this church today! This is a reality, a fact—don't mistake him for a gardener, but recognise him for who he is, he is calling us by our name!

St Paul says: *If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Mary says: “I have seen the Lord!” Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

