

1 April 2018  
EASTER DAY



**John 20:1-18**

Have you ever had an experience in your life where you know that from this point on, things will never be the same again? Perhaps it was when you got married or when your first child was born, or perhaps when someone close to you died. Perhaps it was when you left school and started work or perhaps when you retired from work. In the context of our Christian faith, there may be times when we have had a special sense of God's presence; when we realised for the first time that God loves us and that we have been forgiven because of Jesus, or when a special prayer has been answered. These events are like milestones in our life's journey; times when we often say, "Life will never be the same again!" or sometimes when we sing an hymn and we know it has become real in our own lives. I remember singing **My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose went forth and followed thee**, and at that moment it was real for me. Perhaps we can call these 'foundational experiences.'

It seems to me that the image that is portrayed in the media television newspapers and radio these days is that these foundational experiences are the "stuff of life" – just look at the reality television programmes and the subjects they discuss – the moment I discovered my husband was an alcoholic, or - all points of crisis and things like that. These things are important matters to discuss, but I don't know about you, but I think that I must live a very boring life, because I don't often have moments of crisis like that. The trouble is that we can also take this attitude into our Christian lives as well – to think that we must keep on having major experiences, or perhaps if we do something or go to a special place, then we will somehow get nearer to God and to his purposes. But these experiences do happen and God does allow us from time to time to have major experiences – experiences that could be called foundational – where we can truly say "Life will never be the same again". but I have found that very quickly I have to get back into ordinary life and work out this new experience or understanding of God in the daily pattern of my life.

**<sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

I believe that the reason that many of us are here today is not just out of habit, not just out of duty, but that we have put our faith in Jesus who died and rose again, and that we have found our lives transformed by that faith. We have a relationship with him. We experience him in our prayers, our worship, in the sacrament of Holy Communion, we experience his power as we go out from here and live our lives out in his world. One of the privileges for me of ministering here has been to listen to some people's stories of how their lives have changed by a meeting in a new way with Jesus. Some of these people, I know, are here this morning. How has this happened? By them having an encounter in a new way with the risen Lord Jesus, and to experience him in a daily relationship with him as he walks with them in their life's

journey. So whether you are here because that has happened to you or perhaps because you are still seeking, **welcome**; My prayer is that you will have a real encounter with the Risen Lord Jesus this morning, and this will encourage and deepen your faith and as John says, through believing you will have life in his name, life as Jesus said ' **I have come that they may have life, and life in in all its fullness.**' (John 10:10)

Our reading from John 20 speaks of one of the first encounters with the Risen lord Jesus on that first Easter morning – the encounter with Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene was someone who had already had her life changed by meeting with Jesus. She had been released from 7 demons and had become one of his followers, tradition says she was the women of low character who wiped his feet with her hair in the story from Luke 7 (Luke 7:36-50), the recent film tries to see her differently but she is certainly someone who had great problems and Jesus had set her free from these. She goes to the tomb finds it empty, peter and John run to the tomb, find it empty then go away, Mary is full of grief – grieving that Jesus has been killed, and grieving that she cannot be near his body – to pay her last respects. Then comes the moment when she meets with the risen Lord Jesus and from then on, the whole of her life is changed. She is filled with joy at meeting with him and she is given the task of telling others – the other disciples – the glorious news that Jesus is alive and has been raised from the dead.

Her life is changed forever, just like as I said earlier some of us here have had our lives changed forever by meeting with the risen Lord Jesus. How does it happen?

I believe it happens in three basic ways

[The Mourning.](#)

[The Meeting](#)

[The Mission](#)

Let us look therefore how: **Mary Magdalene Moved from Mourning to Mission**

### **The Mourning:**

Mary was mourning Jesus' death. She was full of grief and weeping, but Jesus met her where she was

That is true of any encounter with Jesus, isn't it? Jesus always meets us where we are, in the middle of our problems and difficulties. One of Jesus' names is Emmanuel – God with us. The message of Good Friday – Jesus' death on the cross is of Jesus identifying with our suffering, with our sin, our weakness and taking it upon himself. We do not have to try to make ourselves believe, or to make ourselves appear good and holy, or to try to make ourselves feel joyful, when we are sad.

Jesus met Mary in the middle of her need, in the middle of her mourning; it is the same with us.

### **The Meeting**

What happens when Mary has a meeting with Jesus?

As our reading says, Her situation is transformed, her mourning is taken away, she is filled with joy and love at seeing Jesus alive again. Jesus is alive; he is risen! Hallelujah!! But what is her reaction to this? As was the custom of the time, she falls at his feet and tries to hold on to them. What is she doing here? In my view, she tries to hold on to Jesus, because she wanted her relationship with Jesus to be restored to what it was before, with her being the faithful follower. It is my view that Mary was therefore still trying to hold on to the past. But Jesus said to her; **'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father**

Instead Jesus is saying 'This is something new; our old relationship was good and right, but what I now want for you and also for others is so much better'. Jesus will not just be her special friend and Saviour, but he will be the Saviour of the whole world

Mary wanted her relationship with Jesus to be as it was before, but when she met with the Risen Lord Jesus, that relationship with Jesus had to change.

And when we meet with the Lord Jesus, our lives have got to change too. We can never be the same. What is God calling you to leave behind today? Perhaps it is an attitude of resentment, or a critical attitude, or persistent doubt, or an addiction in some form or other?. Perhaps it is a hobby or an interest or even a job or even an area of Christian service that has previously been absorbing and fulfilling, but now you know that God is asking you to leave it behind.

Mary Magdalene met with the risen Lord Jesus and her life was never the same again, she now had a relationship with the Risen Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Mission**

Jesus said to Mary ' **Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father**',

Then he goes on to say;

'But (or instead) go to my brothers and say to them "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

Mary Magdalene was given a Mission, a mission to go and give others a Message about Jesus. The message is one of reconciliation and restoration. The disciples are called Jesus' brothers. They are restored, even after their evident failure. They are restored because of Jesus' great love for them. And because of Jesus' victory on the cross and because of His resurrection, the disciples are now told that they can have a personal relationship with God; God is now **their** Father and **their** God.

What is Mary's response to this? She does not try any longer to cling on to Jesus; instead she obeys Jesus and tells the disciples the message Jesus had given her to speak. But, just as Mary was given a mission to go and tell others of God's great love, we have also been given a mission- the task of sharing the good news of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ with others, the message of God's great love for the world.

### Conclusion

Our reading speaks of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. Mary Magdalene came **Mourning**, but Jesus met her where she was. Have you met with the Risen Lord Jesus? Have you allowed him to meet you where you are; in your situation. You may be in a very dark place, or you may be in a good situation. Wherever you are Jesus accepts you and loves you and will meet you where you are.

Mary Magdalene has a **Meeting**, with the Risen Lord Jesus, but that meeting involved change. She had to leave behind her previous relationship with Jesus, one where she could touch and hear and see him, and embrace a new relationship with Him, where she would have to walk by faith. Have you made that step of faith in Jesus? Are you prepared for the changes in your life that it will bring? Are you prepared to let go of things that have held you back?

Mary Magdalene then goes out on a **Mission**, a mission to tell others the good news about the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. That is the mission that we have been given as Christians; to witness to the glorious news that our Lord is risen.

I want to show you Video of a person who had a life changing moment – it is not even a religious experience although the people concerned would call it a spiritual experience. Keala Settle is a lady of Maori extraction who grew up in Hawaii in the USA. She has had a moderately successful career as a singer, but she got a big break in landing the part of Lettie Lutz, a bearded lady in the film about P.T. Barnum called The greatest Showman. The story is of the bearded lady who everybody shuns until she is noticed by Barnum and asked to join his show. Barnum is the first person to really believe in her and this song, "This is me" is the barnstorming Anthem that won an Oscar. Its theme is saying whatever life throws at me, I can now say I am who I am- this is me. But the amazing thing about this video is that it shows the first rehearsal of the song with a full backing choir, and suddenly Keala "gets it", in the

middle of singing she connects with the message- maybe something in her past life where she had been put down by others, and she is transformed as she sings the song. So here is the song, with an interview with the producer and Keala saying what happened

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLFEvHWD\\_NE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLFEvHWD_NE)

Keela got it and inhabited the message, she said it was a other world experience, a foundational experience, like that of Mary Magdelene like that we may have had. Of course we cannot live expecting these experiences all the time, but when they come they convince us of the truth. I wonder if today is a time for that sort of experience? Today you can say Christ is risen and mean it, and genuinely out the past behind you and move in in the knowledge that you are a child of God safe in His hands and safe in the belief that Christ has risen from the dead. I am going to ask you if this is you, to perhaps write down something in your life you want to leave behind you today write it down and as you come for communion, put it on the cross- no-one else will read them they will be burned after the service, an opportunity to say to God, the resurrection is real, I am a child of God, this is me!

This good news of Jesus is what keeps me coming back Sunday-by-Sunday and I am sure it is the same for many of you; as we encounter Jesus in prayer, in the reading and preaching of His word, in the sacrament of communion, as we encounter him in our fellowship with each other. And we also encounter the Risen Lord Jesus out in his world as we carry out the Mission that he has given us of making his Love and grace known. Let us as a church, commit ourselves to continue meeting together where we can experience the Risen Lord Jesus among us, and then let us commit ourselves to the task He has given us; that of leaving behind our own needs and serving the needs of others; witnessing to a needy world that Jesus is alive and is with us always. Amen.

Let us pray

God give us grace as individuals, and together, as the body of Christ, to be like Mary Magdalene, to be so changed by our meeting with the risen Lord Jesus Christ, that we are equipped and enabled to respond to his call to Go and make disciples of all nations, rejoicing in the glorious truth that since the resurrection on that first Easter Morning, Jesus is alive and is with us all, until the end of the age! Amen