

## Easter Tuesday

*Opening Worship at RCC Easter School, Edward King Chapel,  
2023*

*Acts 2: 36-41*

*John 20: 11-18*

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

The Church cannot keep from rejoicing. As, each year, we trace the story of Christ's birth, childhood, ministry, trials, crucifixion and burial, so each year we arrive here, at the great feast of Easter.

And the tradition has always been that Easter lasts longer than Lent. There's something really important there about the absolutely indispensable nature of the resurrection. We fast for 40 days (or actually 46 days if you count the Sundays), but then we celebrate for 50 days. The party lasts longer than the preparation. And that's important, particularly for the Church of England which manages to do suffering quite well, and sometimes struggles to do confidence and joy with the same commitment.

So you will notice that over the coming 50 days, our liturgy, our worship, tries really hard to present this idea that actually every single one of these 50 days is the same day. Is Easter Day. And one of the ways in which that is signalled is in the provision of our Bible readings. Today's readings, on Easter Tuesday, are readings that we are familiar with. Today's gospel reading is the Easter Day gospel of the resurrection in St John's account. And our reading from Acts as well, will turn up several times over the coming weeks. We always read from the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season, because in those accounts we learn of the very first Christians trying to work out what it

means if the resurrection is true. If Christ is risen from the dead, that completely resets our understanding of the world, of our relationship with God, our status as created beings. If this is true, if the sort of love that God has for us is this amazing, this divine, what on earth might our lives be like from now on?

As St Paul says, 'if there is no resurrection then our faith is in vain and we are to be pitied. But, in fact, Christ is risen from the dead, the first fruits of those who sleep.'

When I trained for the ministry 20 years or so ago - (and not, I'm afraid to say, at the magisterial and noble institutions of Oxford or Durham, but in another place entirely), John Chapter 20 was part of the text set for my Greek exam. I spent quite a lot of time with the story of Mary and Jesus in the garden, and although I have lost almost all of my Greek now, I can still dredge bits of this chapter back to mind if I try. And it is a heartbreakingly beautiful passage. Mary Magdalene is first to the tomb, and when Peter and John go hammering off back to their homes, Mary just stays there. And she stays there, weeping. Confusion, apprehension, hurt, bereavement - the weight of the world on her shoulders. But she stays. She stays by the grave, and so it is Mary who meets the gardener. And in her heartbreak she appeals to him, literally in the Greek, 'they took the Lord of me, and I know not where they put him.'

In her confusion, in her grief, her appeal to this stranger in the garden in the early morning is to be reunited with the corpse of her beloved friend, her Lord. 'Tell me where "the Lord of me" has gone?' And so of course it is she who first meets the resurrected Christ. And she recognises him when he calls her name. 'Mary'.

Cutting through the confusion, speaking into the darkness of despair and hopelessness, Mary's name, uttered in love by the Christ who has passed through hell and out into the dazzling

light of resurrection, brings her to glorious hope and faith in the garden that just seconds before only spoke to her of failure and catastrophe. 'Mary'; she turned and said to him, 'Teacher'.

And from Christ's lips comes a mission. 'Go to my brothers...'  
And thus begins our work. It is from Christ's lips that our purpose comes. Go, and say to them... Mary Magdalene went and announced, 'I have seen the Lord'.

And so it is that our Christology shapes everything else that we are about. We gather here this week, to study sacramental theology, mission and ministry, and multifaith awareness. And our various streams of study will carry us deeper into those aspects of the ministry of Christ's church, but it all starts in the Garden. It all starts with Mary Magdalene, that apostle to the apostles, as she has been known through history. It all starts with an encounter with a vibrant, vital, living Lord where only a dead body was sought.

The sacramental theologians among you are going to be sick to the back teeth by the end of this Easter school with me saying things like, 'our worship tells us who we are'. And you can moan to your colleagues on the other streams about me as much as you like. But I say those sorts of things because I know them to be true. There's a saying, I'm not actually sure where it comes from, says of the church, 'we are our rites'. We are our rites. In other words what we do together publicly in worship tells us our identity. And today's opening liturgy absolutely screams our identity at us. We began by marking the Easter candle and what we had to say was utterly Christological. What do we want to say? We want to say that Christ is yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. We want to say that time and the ages belong to him, that the glory and power is his. And that by his holy and glorious wounds he guards and keeps us. And we want to say that he is our light.

And out of that comes our whole identity. So in the Acts of the Apostles, right there as early as chapter 2, is the call to the fundamental mark of our belonging: baptism. And of course out of his holy and glorious wounds, his scarred body and his flowing blood, comes Holy Communion. The two dominical Sacraments, marks of our identity by which, as the Book of Common Prayer puts it, we are regenerated and strengthened.

And just as Mary Magdalene was sent to tell that news to the apostles, so we are sent with that message to the world, a message of regeneration and strengthening. The graveyard of despair and grief becomes the blossoming garden of hope and promise for, as we sang a couple of moments ago, 'as he stands in victory sin's curse has lost its grip on me.'

And not just on me, but on the whole of creation. That is our commission. That is why we are here. That is why we learn sacramental theology, mission and ministry, multifaith awareness. It is why church trains lay ministers, deacons, priests. Even bishops. None of these things exists for their own sake, but because we have a gospel to proclaim. Because, like Mary, we run to tell what we have seen.

Bishop Melita of Sardis, one of the earliest Christian ministers whose words we have recorded, preached this:

'Come, then, all you nations of people, who are joined in an association of sin, and receive forgiveness. For I am your forgiveness, the saving Passover Victim, the Lamb slain for you. I am your cleansing and your life, your resurrection, light and salvation, your King. I bring you with me to the heavenly realm. I shall raise you up and present you to my heavenly Father. I am mighty, and I shall exalt you.'

Alleluia! Christ is risen.