

Year C Easter Day

Acts 10: 34-43

1 Corinthians 15: 19-26

John 20: 1-18

Mind the Gap

As some of you will know, I love this Easter Day gospel reading. It has so much packed in its 18 verses. And the most emotional bit for me is when Jesus says, “Mary!”, and Mary responds with “Rabbouni!”. I don’t think I will ever get the tone right, no matter how much I practice saying those two simple words out loud. I am sure so much love, for all of humanity, not just for Mary, is contained in Jesus’s uttering of her name and in her response.

If any part of the Easter story makes me believe in the miracle and good news of the resurrection it is that simple interchange. For me, it is where I can bridge the gap between faith and understanding, between belief and unbelief, where I feel deep inside that my belief is founded. It gives me the confidence to say, “Jesus Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!”. It is how I can look forward with confidence to these 50 days of the Easter liturgical season with unremitting joy.

There are three main characters besides Christ, in our gospel reading: Mary, Simon Peter and the ‘beloved disciple’. Each of them reacts so differently to the resurrection and helps us in our reactions too. Each trying to see and understand what was happening. On that first Easter day, as the pre-dawn intense darkness gave way to the first weak light of the day, they each had to work out for themselves what to think, what to believe, how to react. It should come as no big surprise to us, that they all reacted in such different ways. As I am sure we would have done.

Mary. Mary was grieving, she was living in it, admitting its rawness, and not hiding from it. She was not denying her grief. She was not trying to distract herself from her grief. Not one bit. How brave and honest that was. To know and experience grief; to not run away from it, but to let it work through her

without totally overwhelming her. She was living in that moment, even if it was one that was full of personal pain for her.

Peter. I am sure Peter was wracked with guilt and had not slept a wink that night. He had denied Jesus three times just as Jesus had said would happen. He had denied his best friend! And he wasn't there when Jesus died. He had hidden away, afraid and alone. So, no wonder when Mary reported that the tomb was empty to Peter and the 'beloved disciple,' that Peter had run to the tomb, looked in without any sense of comprehension, his mind no doubt in complete chaos and with no chance of thinking clearly, and ran or walked back to his hiding place. He was not 'present' in his mind, even if he was physically present at the tomb for a while. Peter found the tomb to be a place he could not remain in, it was unbearable, and he had to get away from it. It was the only way he could cope.

The 'beloved disciple'. He outran Peter to get to the opened tomb, no doubt the benefit of youth helped, but maybe also he wasn't weighed down with the guilt of denial. We are told he went into the tomb after Peter, saw the linen wrappings lying there and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head. We are told that 'he believed', even if he did not fully understand. I wonder if this is the gift of youth? Of not being encumbered with lots of life experiences, of lofty ideals and bitter disappointment, of plans made with good intentions that went awry? The beloved disciple 'sees and believes'. We are not told quite what he believed, but it seems to me that the beloved disciple was open to whatever any given moment would show him, ready to receive those experiences 'with faith', even if it doesn't come with a fully worked out understanding. What a wonderful approach and gift for us.

Each of these three characters, Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter and the beloved disciple, all came to the tomb with their individual perspectives and life experiences. Peter, shown as a flawed character, but so honest for all that, and so true to life. The gospel writer did not airbrush out his response at all. The gospel writer didn't try and represent Peter in a better light. I can so relate to Peter's experiences, and whose actions on that day probably match what many of us would have done. The good news is that, despite his words and actions, his reaction to the empty tomb, he met the resurrected Christ and

became the rock upon which the church was built. That should be good news for us all.

Mary had stayed at the foot of the cross, had observed Jesus' burial, had grieved for him, and wanted to be at the tomb, to be and remain present with Jesus. Despite not seeing clearly, let us also see that as not understanding clearly, as none of us would that Easter morning, she was present, she was the first who was able to see the risen Christ.

The beloved disciple saw and seemingly believed in the resurrection without any real understanding of what had happened. What gift that was. The beloved disciple would also, soon see and experience the risen Christ.

All three of these characters met the risen Christ in a way unique to them, based on their own very individual relationship with Jesus.

I wonder who you most relate to today?

I think we can be like each of these characters at different times in our lives. In different seasons of our lives we can be in a bit of a mess, like Peter, and react with little ability to sensibly process anything at the time. But Christ can still meet us. In other seasons of our lives we can be focussed on our feelings and emotions and the lived experience happening right before us, like Mary. It can be hard to be in that 'living in the moment' sort of life, especially at times of grieving and sorrow, but Christ will meet us there. And we can be like the beloved disciple, where we accept what is, in faith, and do not need to fully understand it all at that precise moment. Christ can meet us there, too.

Each of these three characters met the risen Christ where they were in their lives at that time, in ways that they could relate to. It was Anselm of Canterbury who first coined the phrase, 'faith seeking understanding'. He encouraged people to start from where they were, from our own lived experiences of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Starting from a point of faith, from our own relationship with Christ, and then and only then start to seek to understand.

We have fifty days of unremitting joy of the Easter season stretching out before us. Where might you meet the risen Lord during this Easter season?

Where might you, based on your temperament, and life experience, be most open to an encounter with our Lord and saviour?

What will help you have the faith to say, 'Christ is risen. He is risen indeed |!'

Faith may seek understanding, but for now, don't worry about the gap between them. Let us seek to 'see and believe', like the beloved disciple, and like Mary, be able with astonishment and joy, experience the risen Christ and say 'Rabbouni!

During this Easter season may we all be able to say, with joyful hearts, 'Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!'