

## EASTER DAY SERMON 2023: St Mary's Woodbridge with Great Bealings

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed, alleluia!**

'Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." And she told them that he had said these things to her.' *May I speak in the power of Christ Jesus, risen, ascended, glorified. AMEN*

What does our risen Lord do that morning for Mary in Gethsemane? Broadly put, he changes her life. She 'turns' to him, St. John tells us: *στραφεισα*. A summons by name becomes the fulcrum of her decision-making: this morning in the garden, as day breaks, she turns, goes and follows Jesus evermore.

And of course, it is not only she who will see and receive the resurrected Lord this day, for Mary has become the baton-bearer; the new Baptist-Herald. One may even go so far as to say she is the first apostle: 'I have seen the Lord.' No longer may she be able to speak on her own or within the limited bounds of her selfhood; she can no longer know such confines - she who is lower than low in man's eyes - a prostitute no less. 'I have seen the Lord.' I can never be the same person following this! 'How can I keep from singing' might well be her song. Alleluia indeed!

'Do not hold onto me,' urges our Lord. *Μη μου απτου* 'but go...' You have a Gospel to go and tell my brothers that is given to you to do; it is your vocation; I have called *you* by name, 'Mary'; you are mine. Go forth and tell! So we have it:

*'Went Mary the Magdalene to the disciples announcing I have found [seen] the Lord, and these things said he to me.'*

It is so revealing in Greek as the Gospel-writer reveals, as it were live, what Mary's reaction is. We don't have to wait for what happens next, it is instantaneous; reflexive. What happens to Mary on that first Easter morning is something that happens to her own self and transforms that self. The redeemed one can do no other than to go forth and tell in real time. To bring the light and life of the found Lord out of darkness into day, and so be changed from the inside out because of all she has seen and heard.

Mary lives this experience; it really happens to her, and because of the power it carries, others are able to see and believe. Think of Thomas in the Gospel a few verses further on. 'Put your finger here... do not doubt but believe.' The resurrection encounters are intimate and intrapersonal; they happen in unique ways between Jesus and the apostles to whom he appears: Mary is named and greets the *Rabbouni* in their native Aramaic; Thomas touches and is released to the joy of recognition as he cries, 'My Lord and my God.' Simon Peter, impetuous feet-first follower, rock of the Catholic Church we know today and the unnamed beloved disciple both enter the tomb, they see its emptied freedom – they believe on the sign of the folded grave-clothes and the unbarred entrance. So they see Jesus, their Christ and ours. They return to their homes says the evangelist. Nothing is now preventing them; they themselves have been released. Simeon's prophecy of some thirty years earlier is fulfilled: the Father's servants go in peace as the divine and final Word who is God speaks and is forever heard. The light to enlighten the Gentiles truly is become the glory of His people Israel.

And today as on every Easter morning for the past two millennia, we here walk back to the garden with Mary. We re-enter the tomb with John and Simon Peter. Like them, can we ever 'understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead?' Well, it is perfectly possible to read many an academic tome on the evidence for resurrection: Professor Tom Wright should keep you going for a few weeks to start with!

But the need of comprehension and explanation has never been at the heart of the Gospel. The Eastertide gospel, rather, is a proclamation of love. An *Euangellion*: A news headline whose cosmological significance and urgency was, and continues to be, unprecedented. And we only need to be minded to hear it and believe, for this is what faith is about. If someone ever asks why you are a Christian, then surely your own answer needs to mirror Mary's relational response. To be a "little Christ" It is to look in on the hope given by the gracious invitation of the Word made flesh, to 'turn' to what is before us and trust in it. It is to hear our names spoken with Mary Magdalene and exclaim, '*Rabbouni*' – master.

We inhabit a culture and society which is visibly desperate for answers; for the oasis of truth upon a sea of equivocation and often plain lies. Yet throughout this Holy Week, we

have had all truth recapitulated to us in the saving events of His passion and death: this Jesus whose murder-weapon we now behold empty and powerless. – empty of all things that is, but love.

We have walked with Jesus Easter after Easter although not understanding his call and the ancient prophecy of a Messiah who will suffer and die to save his people. Yet we only have to come and see in order to go and tell. For we will surely all be changed by this amazing *Rabbouni* who raises us once more with him today to the life of eternity. And we don't need to know, nor do we need to understand. We simply need to want to love. And to love in such a way, and with such a passion and urgency as we have been so loved. This is the mystery of our faith, and its meaning: Love, the Christ himself is our path and our prize.

'Mary...' 'Master.' She loves, therefore she is, for Mary understands all that there is to know.

So let us go this joyful morning with her and Peter and John once more to where his body lay, that we may turn hopefully to Him who lives no more to die, and meets us in his glorious risen life, saying, 'go and tell my brothers,' that all who have not seen may yet come to believe and know themselves beloved of the glory of the Son, whose Father saves all who confess his name faithfully and worship our Lord and our everlasting God in Spirit and in truth.

There is need of only one thing, teaches Jesus. See what He has done for us that we should also choose the better part and go forth and tell all these things.

How can an Easter people whose song is 'Alleluia' ever keep from singing? **AMEN**