

## Sermon Easter Sunday 2022

Welcome, welcome to our celebration of Easter, celebrating Jesus Christ risen from the dead. Celebrating anything seems good does it not? I certainly celebrate being covid free and staying well for these two years and more. But usually, we plan celebrations do we not? Unlike Mary Magdalene on that first Easter Day, you know what to expect today. You are not still crying day and night, and your heart is not overwhelmed in grief. You did not rise before dawn in the dark, as you may have done during one of those power cuts you may remember too vividly. You took your time to get ready for worship here or at home (maybe still in your pjs and cradling your first cup of coffee) but you are with us now. Mary Magdalene, we understand, went to the tomb that early Sunday morning with just one other woman. We understand they had been part of the team of women who had ministered to Jesus and his disciples. What did they find? In Mark's Gospel, they ask each other the question, "Who will roll away the stone for us?" Both had been there on Good Friday when Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped Jesus' body and placed it in the tomb. They knew that a large stone, I assume a boulder, had been placed across the entrance to the tomb. But when they arrived there, the stone had been rolled away. There was no longer any obstacle preventing them from seeing the body of Jesus. Mary must have looked inside because she ran to tell the disciples, Peter and the one Jesus loved, that his body had been removed. Can you imagine how confused she was, how they all were? Mary had seen Jesus' body placed in the tomb on Friday afternoon; so, where was it now? Dead bodies don't usually disappear. Her life experiences told her that; thus, where was it?

But Mary did what she was asked to do. Having told Peter and the other disciple what she had seen, she followed them back to the tomb. And she showed tenacity. They left, just as she had done earlier. They had not seen the body placed in the tomb, but she had; she knew it had been placed there and was puzzled maybe frightened by the disappearance of Jesus body. She was immersed in her puzzlement and grief. She just stayed there, all alone. It was then she experienced the two angels speaking to her. She alone saw the man whom she thought was a gardener. She alone experienced meeting the risen Christ. She then went to share this good news with Jesus' disciples. What a privilege; what an amazing responsibility. She must have remembered these moments all her life. For the last two days she had been in deepest grief at the foot of the cross, that cross upon which Jesus had been crucified. She had witnessed how his dead body had been carried to the tomb. She had watched Joseph place it in the tomb, so much loss, so much anguish.

Can you remember life changing moments? Can you remember one event that changed your life? It may have been something very positive or something sadly negative. From other documents we learn that Mary became an active leader in the early church; inspired by Jesus resurrection. Her grief and mourning were replaced by hope and new life. She was going to start living again, living with hope, and sharing the love that Jesus had showed them all throughout his ministry. What about you, today? Are you going to live with hope and share Jesus love? Is Jesus' resurrection going to change your life? What things you have seen or heard could do that? Something to ponder over.

Whenever I do a funeral of someone, especially if they have died at an elderly age, and younger family members are present. I nearly always make a point of saying to the family and those younger people there that they should remember that now they are living for their beloved grandfather (or grandmother) and that he would want them to live well and succeed. Yes, there was a time for grieving which was indeed what they were doing at that moment, but they had to go on living too. He would

have wished them to do so. His earthly life had ended, and he was in eternity with God. They were very much alive and should live the way he would want them to live. Yes, of course everyone at the service could stay forever mourning for his loss and grieve he was not with them bodily. Or they could celebrate all he had been in his earthly life and be inspired to live the best ways they could, holding all he had meant to them in their hearts and minds.

In the same way you can stay in grief, mourning the horror of Good Friday and Jesus' death upon the cross. Or you can decide to live your life following him and trying to live the way he would want you to live. This means you remember his commands; especially the two he gave you on Maundy Thursday just three days ago. You are to be a servant, one who ministers to others. You need to remember how he served others throughout his ministry. He also told his disciples that they were to love one another, just as he loved them. That was how they were to live.

Today we are celebrating Jesus raised from the dead, Jesus resurrected and with us and with us forever. If you worshipped with us these last three days you would have experienced the horror, the agony and finally the death of Jesus as an earthly man. But today you can celebrate that God raised him from the dead.

Have you thought how you can share this wonderful news? Have you thought that you can share it by the way you live, by the things you say, by what you do? Have you ever told anyone that "Jesus loves you?" Can others see Jesus in you by all you say and do? If not, is it because there is something blocking their vision of you? Is it they cannot see the "you" you would like to present to the world because something is in the way? Do you need to remove that large stone in your life just as the stone blocking Jesus tomb was removed?

I invite you to think about what it is that is blocking your goodness, your willingness to minister, your ability to open your heart in love. Is it a blockage of guilt or disappointment from the past, or of recent times? Is it a blockage of resentment which has grown in your heart and mind and never been removed? Is it a blockage of inadequacy which has prevented you from being the person God created you to be? If you can remove all those blockages, then think about the ways in which you are showing your love for God's people and God's creation? If not, have you asked God to remove that stone and allow all the goodness in you to come out so that you can make a difference in God's world?

When I think of those who are making a difference, I think of all of you who provided so many supplies for the North Porch ministry of providing for needy families with babies and young children. The past two Christmases you gave me a car load of supplies which I took with joy to our North Porch center where I was working each Tuesday morning during covid. I celebrate that now our centers are open, and staff are running them, and I can use Tuesday for ministry here again! I think about the few who ensure our worship can be seen and heard by those of you using live streaming. I think about those of you who brought lovely Easter bags of little gifts for the needy families provided for by the Chester food pantry. I think about those of you in our inreach team who have made meals and taken them to members of Messiah during this time. I think about those who volunteer in the thrift shop week by week. I think about those you bring food items for the food pantries week by week. I think about those who have tended our grounds, and I hope they will do so again soon, with the better weather coming. I think about those who reach out to the isolated and lonely in support and friendship. I think about those who have helped at Homeless Solutions. I think about those teach our children in Sunday school each week, and also send Sunday school materials to our families with children who are

not present with us. I think about those who care for our buildings. I think about those who administer our different communications and financial responsibilities. I think about those of you who do a ministry on your own, regularly serving those in need. I think about you all and pray for you all each day. That is my ministry for you all. Today I invite you to think about your ministry for all at Messiah, as well as your ministry in the world. Our Book of Common Prayer remind you that your ministry is to bear witness to Christ wherever you may be and, according to the gifts given you, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world. Do you know this? It is like saying share Christ's love with everyone, every day of your life, as best you can.

The good news is that Easter is not just a day but a season lasting 50 days. You have time to decide how you are going to go forward as Christ's minister. Our world needs you. Imagine if the estimated 2.2 billion Christians in the world all took seriously Christ's call to make difference and minister to the sick, the lost, the needy the lonely, in his name how different a world it would be. So, today be prepared to take the love of Christ to all the parts of the world you connect with. You may have heard me use the blessings attributed to St Frances. It ends with the words:

May you be blessed with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, and you can do whatever others claim cannot be done.

And so, may God bless you as you go forward as Christ's minister to share the love of God everywhere and with everyone, every day of your life. Amen.