

‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ Words of an angel, words of a gardener to a woman weeping at a graveside.

We have just sung as our opening hymn on Easter Day that hymn of triumph:

Jesus Christ is risen today, *Alleluia!*
Our triumphant holy day, *Alleluia!*
Who did once, upon the cross, *Alleluia!*
Suffer to redeem our loss. *Alleluia!*

The Cross is a thing of the past; the work is done, ‘It is finished’, the task complete, the job is done.

Of course for Mary coming to the tomb that first Easter morning, the cross was anything but a thing of the past. The memories of watching Jesus die were still raw. She came that day to mourn the death of a dear friend, to pay her respects; to be there, as folk often are when they go to a grave, with her memories; memories of acceptance, of inspiration, of friendship; memories of someone who had touched the hearts of those on the margins, who had sat down with the sinners, had touched the leper; who had spoken words of healing and liberation, ‘Your sins are forgiven – now go and sin no more.’

Finding the tomb open and empty is at that point not a source of joy or hope or celebration, it is an occasion of deep despair and desolation. She has rushed back to tell the disciples; ‘The tomb is empty, someone has taken the body!’ Peter and the other disciple rush past her, rush to the tomb. They see the body has gone but the grave clothes are still there. They then head back leaving Mary all by herself, with her confusion, her despair, her tears.

John tells us she looked in the tomb. The body is gone, two angels sitting where he had been laid. ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ ‘The body is gone – I don’t know where it is.’ And she leaves. Again, this time a stranger asks, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ ‘Look if you know where the body is – just tell me and I will take it somewhere else.’ Then she hears her name, ‘Mary’. And it all falls into place. Gone is the confusion, the hurt and the pain. Now there is joy and hope as she goes to embrace her Lord. Now she could sing ‘Jesus Christ is risen today, *Alleluia!*’

There is something profound in the way John has chosen to tell his story. The change in Mary, the subsequent change in the other disciples comes not when they see an empty tomb, that only adds to the pain and confusion. The change comes when they experience the risen Jesus.

This led me to think a bit about how the risen Christ comes to us. As we read the Gospel accounts of the appearance of the risen Jesus to the disciples after the resurrection there is an element of the unexpected in all of them. He comes to Mary in the garden; he comes to the disciples as they hide behind locked doors, standing among them, showing his hands and his side, speaking words of peace; he comes to disciples, frightened and despairing as they hurry out of Jerusalem along the Emmaus Road, listens to their pain and their confusion, and at the end of day makes himself known in the breaking of bread. He comes also to Saul of Tarsus, storming along the road to Damascus, with plans to nip this risen Jesus business in the bud, challenges his hostility and calls him to service.

The risen Christ comes to us. Comes to us in our sorrow and speaks words of hope and life to our distracted hearts. He comes to us in our awareness of weakness and failure in his service and shows us his pierced hands and speaks his words of forgiveness. Comes to us in our confusion and speaks his words of peace. Christ comes to us in and through other people. As I say that, I am sure many of you can think of particular people who have touched your lives – it may have been a time of crisis in your life - or it may have been in a chance meeting or encounter. Whatever they said, or maybe it was just their presence – you just sensed Christ’s presence with you. In truth, Christ makes himself present in and through the most unlikely of people.

He makes himself present in and through you and me. As followers of Jesus may we be open to see his presence in others and may we be open to being channels of his presence for other people.

1 Christ be beside me,
Christ be before me,
Christ be behind me,
 King of my heart.
Christ be within me,
Christ be below me,
Christ be above me,
 never to part.

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3 Christ be in all hearts
thinking about me,
Christ be on all tongues
 telling of me.
Christ be the vision
in eyes that see me,
in ears that hear me,
 Christ ever be.