

It's Easter Day, 12 April 2020 – probably one of the strangest Easters most of us will ever experience. Easter Day in lockdown, confined to our homes and gardens, unable to worship in our churches, unable to gather with our family and friends unless, perhaps, via Zoom or Skype.

Today, we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus – but tomorrow, for many of us, it may seem as though we go back to Holy Saturday ... back to the period of waiting ... of silence ... of emptiness ... of grief. Perhaps, even today, that is how you feel. Perhaps, you feel little Easter joy, or Easter hope, today.

Perhaps this Easter is the closest most of us will ever get to the first Easter. If you're struggling to feel the Easter joy, and to experience the Easter hope, today, that's ok. For remember, the first Easter began, for Jesus' disciples, and his mother, with grief ... heartache ... emptiness ... numbness. As the day drew on, and strange rumours and tales of the resurrection began to spread, bewilderment and confusion were, perhaps, the next emotions to appear. And only later, perhaps, a glimmer of hope ...

I've struggled to write sermons over these last few weeks. It's hard to speak into the emptiness and silence of these days. Perhaps this isn't a time for words. Perhaps we're being called to sit in silence, and to let God speak into the silence? (As I was writing this, a phrase from Scripture – “deep calls to deep,” came in to my head, from Psalm 42. It's a Psalm which speaks into this situation, for those who are missing the normal Easter morning procession around church, the shouts of Alleluia, and your favourite Easter hymns, and for whom our live-streamed All-Age Eucharist wasn't quite what you needed today. If you're missing Easters of years past, and your soul is cast down or disquieted, you might wish to read Psalm 42 at some point today).

As I mentioned, I've struggled to write sermons during the current lockdown, but I thought this poem I wrote some years ago might be helpful, for some, today:

Easter Morning – Mary Magdalene

Based on John 20:1-18

It's early.

You haven't slept.
You've lain in bed for hours,
Tossing and turning,
Waiting for dawn to break.

Finally, you can stand it no more.
There's no reason to get up.
It's over.
Your Lord and Master, your friend, your teacher,
the man you adored,
Is gone.

Life hardly seems worth living.
There's no reason to get up,
No reason to go on living.
But you can't stay in bed.
You must be active,
Do something –
Anything –
To take your mind off
What they've **done** to your Lord.

You push back the covers,
Put your feet on the cold stone floor.
You light an oil lamp,
Watch the flame splutter and flicker
before it stands proud and tall.
You slowly put on the same clothes you discarded
the night before.

You don't care what you look like.
No point in making any effort;
No point in combing the tangles
Out of your long, dark hair;
No point in anointing yourself with perfume.
You splash cold water on your face,
and you feel it run down your cheeks, mingling with the warm tears
then dripping to the floor.

You stand with your hand on the door.

Where shall you go?
What shall you do?
Where **can** you go?

Suddenly, the answer comes to you –
“To the tomb.”
Will it be **safe**?
Should you go alone?
Would it not be better to go with others?

You can't stop yourself.
You feel compelled to go to the tomb, **now**.
You know it's dangerous.
You know it doesn't make sense.
Nothing will stop you now.
Your mind's made up.

You feel **compelled** to go to the tomb,
where your Lord has been laid.

You hurry through the dark streets
To the outskirts of the city,
Towards the garden and the tomb.
You're barely aware
That your feet are stumbling over stones,
That your gown is trailing in the dust.

As you get closer to the tomb,
Your pace quickens.
You aren't thinking.
You don't know what you're going to do
When you reach the tomb.
You just know that you **have** to get there.

Not far now.
Around the last corner,
Up the last incline.

Before you can see the tomb properly,
You know that something isn't right.
You stop.

You hold your hand over your lamp.

You listen.

Silence.

Nothing.

Not even the song of a bird
heralding the dawn.

You approach cautiously,
But you can sense there's no-one there.
No sound of soldiers, guarding the tomb.
The garden's deserted.
Your eyes peer through the gloom.
You can't see clearly,
But you know something isn't right.
Slowly, you withdraw your hand from the lamp,
Let the flame flare brightly.

It illuminates the gaping mouth of the tomb.
The stone has gone –
rolled away
and the tomb lies empty.

They've taken away your Lord.
They've taken him,
And you don't know
Where they have laid him.

You must do something.
You turn.
You gather up the skirts of your robes,
Away from your dusty feet,
And you run.

You run.
You run from the tomb,
Through the garden,
Along the dusty tracks,
Through the narrow streets.

You hammer your fists
On the wooden door

And shout and yell
Until a man thrusts open the door,
Clamps a hand angrily over your mouth,
Takes your arm
And drags you inside.

“Are you mad?” he asks.
“Do you want the whole world to know
Where we are hiding?”

“The tomb,” you gasp, “the tomb.”
“It’s empty. They’ve taken away my Lord.”

They run past you,
Out the door,
Back the way you’ve come
Towards the tomb.

You run after them,
But you can’t keep up.
You’re out of breath,
Exhausted,
Weary,
Alone.

You slow down.
You follow them,
Disconsolately,
At a distance.

You feel somehow removed from the situation,
numb and detached
As you stand apart
And watch them
Enter the empty tomb ...
Then emerge again.

You stand apart,
Unnoticed,
As they walk away
From the empty tomb

Back towards their homes,
Their families.
You stand near the tomb
And weep
Tears of anguish,
Tears of anger,
Tears of frustration,
Exhaustion,
Grief.

You weep for your Lord
And you weep for yourself.

Then you stoop
And look into the tomb.

You expect darkness,
To have to hold up your lamp
To penetrate the gloom.

Instead, you drop your lamp.
You have to shield your eyes
To protect them
From the radiant light.
You peek through your fingers
At the dazzling white figures
Sitting in the tomb
Where your Lord was laid.

They speak:
“Woman, why are you weeping?”
You say to them,
“They have taken away my Lord
And I do not know where they have laid him.”

You turn around ...
And see the gardener.

Maybe **he** knows
Where they've taken your Lord.
Maybe **he** has moved him.

He speaks to you
Gently, kindly:
"Woman, why are you weeping?
Who are you seeking?"

"Sir," you say,
"If you've taken him,
Tell me where you have laid him,
And I will take him away."

He looks at you
With eyes full of compassion
And love.

He calls you by name,
"Mary."

You recognise your Lord,
Your teacher.
"Rabboni," you say,
And you reach out your hand
In wonder and awe.
You touch him, tentatively
Then you
Throw your arms around him
In joyful, exuberant abandon.
He laughs
And holds you close
While you weep,
Then he gently, tenderly, extricates himself,
Takes a step backwards
So he can look you straight in the eye
Before he says,

"Don't cling to me,
For I have not yet ascended
To the Father."

He entrusts you with a task,
A job,

To do for him.
He affirms you.
You are special
And he entrusts **you**
With this important job.
“Go to my brothers and sisters
And tell them:
‘I am ascending to my father,
And your father,
And my God,
And your God.’”

You look at your Lord.
A long, lingering look
At the risen Lord.
You drink from his presence
And are refreshed
And renewed.

You'd like to stay,
To be with him,
Always;
But he's entrusted you
With a job to do.
There's important work to be done.
You have a purpose,
A mission,
A calling.

You turn
And walk away
From the empty tomb.