

# *Easter Sunday 2025*



## **THE GOSPEL READING: John 20:1-18**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' 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.



## *Will the Night Pass?* *John 20:1-18*

### Rejoice or Despair?

A very happy Easter to you all. How do you feel this morning now that, in the words of the Easter Vigil "our Lenten observance is ended"? Some of us will be rejoicing that we can once again eat chocolate! A friend of mine will be rejoicing that he can once again have his refreshing glass of wine each evening. Our choir will be rejoicing that they can relax after a long week of singing. My colleagues at Derby Cathedral will be rejoicing that they have once again almost completed the 27 services that taking place in that building during Holy Week.

It can feel difficult to rejoice sometimes though, can't it? Especially at the moment, when you look at how the human race is going, it can very easy to despair. When you look at the apparently endless cycles of evil and retribution, of selfishness and suffering in the world, do you despair about the human race ever rising out of the mire of self-seeking? When you watch the news and hear about wars, violence, natural disasters and global warming spiraling out of control do you despair about the very continued existence of our human race and planet earth? When you think about death, do you see that as a final defeat in the struggle against extinction? It certainly would be easy to think all of these things. Even the bible has a book that gives us this message – "Vanity, vanity all is vanity and a chasing of the wind". Life is tough and then we die is the message that comes through again and again in the book of Ecclesiastes. And in our gospel passage this morning, Mary despaired. It felt as though her world had come to an end.

The cycle of evil and retribution had, it seemed, triumphed and death had won the day. But then Mary sees the risen Lord. She experiences the Gospel - Christ is Risen Life *is* stronger than death – the Light *has* overcome the darkness. Love has and always will conquer evil and hatred.

### The Lens of the Resurrection

The resurrection we celebrate today isn't just about that event 2000 years ago in Palestine - it is about the whole way the Universe works. New Testament theologian Lesley Newbiggin once said:

"It has never at any time been possible to fit the resurrection of Jesus into any world view except a world view of which it is the basis".

This is so true. In the light of the resurrection, everything changes. Looking at the world through the lens of the resurrection means saying there is much more to life than this world - which means that, even if we manage by global warming or our own human foolishness to destroy our very planet and everything on it, still we have hope! There is more to life than this world – which means that when we approach the subject of death – a subject that most of our western world seems to want to avoid - we will find that the way of death is not a road to oblivion but a road to new life.

## Hanging Onto Hope

Vera Brittain in her autobiography “Testament of Youth” tells of the horrors of the first world war. She describes her own bleakness and devastation as one after another those dear to her were killed in the war. In 1916 her fiancé, Roland Leighton, was killed in France. Vera describes the Easter Sunday morning following his death. She says she went to Church and sat beneath a painting on the wall. It showed the tragic figure of Hagar from the book of Genesis, exiled in anguish in the wilderness. And the title of the painting was “Watchman, will the night pass?”

And, describing the darkness of that Easter Morning, Vera Brittain clearly identified with Hagar in her anguish, and says that for her too the day was still dark, and she just hung on hoping that indeed the night would pass. Sometimes hanging onto hope is all we can do. Our lives - indeed our whole world - can sometimes seem very dark- and God does not promise us that we will not have any struggles in the long night watches – but he does promise us the dawn. Watchman will the night pass?

Yes, the night will pass, for the light of Christ, the resurrection hope of this Easter morning is just as true for us today as it was for Mary and the disciples 2000 years ago. Into all our struggles, all our pains, all our sufferings, comes the gentle voice of Christ whispering our name in love just as he did Mary's, and bringing us the hope he brought to her. And in our darkest night we too can say with Mary “I have seen the Lord” - even though he may seem hard to find in that moment, still we know we *have* seen him, we *have* heard him, we *have* experienced his risen presence in our lives.

## Resurrection Life Now

Resurrection life is our hope for the future – but it is also our present reality. At our clergy conference in Dery Diocese some years ago, one of our keynote speakers, talked about his frustration with Christians who seem to think that the life of faith in Christ is all about a future hope of heaven, all about saving us from a future in hell. “What a sad reason to believe in Jesus” he said. I agree. The resurrection is about a hope we have in the here and now. Jesus did not say “I *will* be the Resurrection and the Life” He said “I *am* the Resurrection and the Life” As Christians we need to grasp the wonderful fact that we can know glimpses of heaven, glimmerings of the glory of life in all its fullness here in this world.

The great theologian John Robinson once said that life has a grain running through it, and the grain goes in the direction of God's love. That love is for all of us, wherever we are, whatever we have done, whatever has happened or is happening to us.

And that love is present now. We follow Jesus not so that we can avoid eternity in hell, but because in so doing we begin to feel the chains of our captivity loosening, we see the light beginning to seep over the horizon we have a tiny taste of heaven here on earth as we sense the love of God in our midst. Watchman, will the night pass? Yes it will pass! Resurrection life, life in all its fullness, is here and it is now. So let us hurry with Mary to the empty tomb. Let's bring with us our sins and sorrows, our fears and our heartaches, our joys and hopes, and let us lay them at the feet of our risen Lord.

Then let's watch as all that we have and all that we are is transformed by the light of the resurrection, and by God's unlimited, graceful love. And then let us say once again, just as Mary said that first glorious Easter morning, "I have seen the Lord!"

Amen.