

Make a joyful noise – Alleluia!

Easter Day 16 April 2017

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Acts 10:34-43

Colossians 3:1-4

John 20:1-18



A sign affixed to a lamppost kept me entertained for quite a while as I drove to and from work: “Noisy cars meeting”. I tried putting apostrophes in various places, as there weren’t any: Noisy cars’ meeting (a meeting of noisy cars). I tried a colon, Noisy: cars meeting. It was actually a meeting for locals struggling with the revving and squealing noises emanating from cars late at night on Bealey Ave.

But it got me thinking. We live in a noisy world, whether it’s the hustle and bustle of the city with its traffic, alarms and sirens, or the canned muzak ever present in our shops and malls, or the ringtones, message alerts and beeps of the technology to which most of us are semi-permanently attached.

It’s been salutary then to wind down the noise and the light levels in the solemn Holy Week services we’ve held here over these last few days and to let the power of symbol speak without noise, just of itself.

First the Maundy Thursday remembrance of the Last Supper and of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet. Bread, wine, pouring water, the scent of lavender. The stripping of the altar, back to naked wood. The rich reds and golds of the Chapel of Repose with its flickering candles, the sound of the rain on the roof. Then Good Friday’s Liturgy of the Cross, the starkness of the reading of John’s Passion, the cry ‘Crucify him”, kneeling before the cross, devotion, bread and wine shared, his dear body broken and blood shed for us . Holy Saturday, holding our breath, watching and waiting. Then as Easter day dawned, new fire, new Paschal Candle lit, raised high, water blessed and sprinkled, baptismal promises confirmed and renewed, darkness slowly turning to light.

So it was that first Easter Day, but it began in darkness, early on the first day of the week. John’s Gospel loves the imagery of darkness and light, right from the prologue where we hear of the Word, who is the light of all people: the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it (John 1:4,5). But this was yet in the future for Mary Magdalene, she comes to the tomb in the darkness, the one thing she knows is that Jesus, the one she followed and loved and served has died, she knows only the depths of grief and despair. And so in encountering the empty tomb, the only thing she can think of that must have happened is that Jesus’ body has been removed from the tomb

and she doesn't know where he's been taken to, three times she says we don't know where they have laid him. This is the body she wanted to show care and respect to, the last thing she could do for Jesus.

Running to share this unexpected and grim news with Peter and probably John, they race to the tomb. I love the way in this account, as so often in John's gospel, he paints a vivid picture of their personalities: John younger but cautious, Peter slogging along behind but throwing caution to the winds and blundering into the tomb. They both see the linen wrappings that Jesus' body had been wrapped with. For John, there is a glimmer of hope and belief, but neither of them really get what has happened, and they go off home.

But Mary, but Mary – she is still stuck in her experience thus far, and it is one of weeping for a stolen body, a loved one gone missing. Her tears blur her from seeing the significance of two angels in the tomb, and she gives them the same answer she gave to the disciples earlier: they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.

Then Mary sees someone who asks her the same question: Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?

John alone of the Gospel writers tells us that in the place where Jesus was crucified and where he was buried in a tomb, there was a garden. So it's not unnatural for Mary Magdalen to mistake Jesus for the gardener.

And little does she know what a truth she tells. For John frames his gospel to reflect images of *creation* and *new creation*. John's prologue "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God*" echoes the prologue of Genesis: '*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*'. God the Creator was the original Gardener of the garden of Eden if you like, and now Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the Gardener of the garden of the new creation. So Mary says more than she knows.

Then Jesus says to her "Mary". He calls her by name - the Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name, his sheep hear his voice and they know him and follow him (John 10).

And Mary replies "Rabbouni" - Teacher. Mary the disciple has found her master again, and naturally enough she wants to embrace him. I've always found Jesus' words to Mary here, Do not hold on to me, almost heartless. Artworks depicting this scene are often called in Latin, 'noli me tangere', literally 'don't touch me', almost as if it were a brush-off.

But really Jesus is even now *teaching* Mary, saying ever so gently don't cling on to me, don't try to hold on to me as I was, as you knew me as your rabbi

and teacher. Jesus now standing so lightly on the ground, cannot be held down in one place.

Mary will have to learn to know Jesus in a new way now, to know his presence with her by his Spirit, when she can no longer see and touch him, just as the other disciples will have to learn to do also. As Jesus will say to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (John 20:29).

Jesus goes on to give Mary a very important commission: 'Go to my brothers and tell them I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Jesus by his death and resurrection brings us into the family of God, privileged to be brothers and sisters of Christ.

And it is Mary Magdalene who is the first to proclaim that good news to the other disciples, and so came to be called in the church 'the apostle to the apostles'.

Today we are all 'Mary Magdalenes': that commission is ours too - to proclaim the good news of the risen Christ in our lives as Easter people. That may well be costly - for Mary that meant leaving the Jesus she had only just encountered as risen, to fulfil her mission to share the good news. That was the real test of her love - to come down from the mountain-top of her experience with the risen Jesus, to the valley below. We can't stay in the place of heavenly experiences and remain oblivious to the people with real needs all around us. Others need to hear of the risen Jesus and his love for them; we too are called to share this good news, and Jesus promises to be with us by his Spirit as we do so.

And so Mary goes off to the other disciples and tells them "I have seen the Lord". My parents were most amused once to receive a postcard from me from St Michael's Mount, in Cornwall, where I cheerfully announced that I had met the Lord in the garden! I meant the Lord of the manor...I met the Lord in the garden - where will you look for the risen Jesus today?

Perhaps you will meet him in the peace and serenity of a garden, in the beauty of God's creation, on this first day of the week, the first day of the new creation. Perhaps you will meet him in the business of this city, in the crush and press of the real world we live in - as you walk the streets of this city, look for him in the faces you meet. Perhaps you will meet him today in the Eucharist, as he gives himself to us in bread and wine, and in the body of Christ gathered round his table, as we proclaim, 'The Lord is here, God's Spirit is with us.' Perhaps you will meet the risen Christ today in the worship and music of this sacred space, in the beauty of the flowers and the candle flames and the icon of the risen Christ.

Where will you look for the risen Jesus today?

For the joy and good news of the Easter message is that the risen Jesus comes to us first, and seeks us out, calls us by name, and calls us to follow him into life, life abundant and eternal.

*Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom.*

(Thine be the glory')

We Anglicans are not terribly into making a noise in our services, we're usually a bit too restrained for that! But today is the day of all days to make a joyful noise unto the Lord! Today we get out again the A-word that we have put away during Lent – Alleluia! Today we ring bells of joy!

So I invite you to join with me in making a joyful noise as we proclaim again that great Easter greeting which will resound around the world today:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed, Alleluia!