

John 20: Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' 14 At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

16 Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni' (which means 'Teacher').

17 Jesus said 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.

That's how John records the first Easter morning. I wonder how Mary, John and Peter felt about it. Let's hear them speak.

## MARY

How could I sleep, my mind was in a whirl – despair, grief, feeling lost. Actually I was afraid. What would become of me, of us? Who could we turn to? And Jesus was lying dead in a borrowed grave. I had to go. I had to be sure and there were things I could do in terms of spices. I know it was dark and I should have been scared but something drove me to go. So I did. I kept on stumbling because it was so dark but a few shards of light began to emerge in the east.

That's not to say I wasn't anxious. As I approached the tomb which friends told me belongs to one of the richer people around, I stopped. Somebody had rolled the stone away. Was someone in there? What would I do?

I turned and ran, ran faster than I'd ever run before – and even though it was so early the only place I thought of going was to where I knew Jesus' friends were. Help, I hardly knew them and when I got there I blurted out, **'They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!'**

I have no idea what they'd been doing but my words galvanised them into action. Peter and John (the ones I recognised took off). Because I was really puffed, I didn't try to keep up with them.

### **JOHN**

Suddenly something to focus on, we'd been sitting round, fearful, and anxious wondering what was going to become of us. I guess we knew from our nation's past that when the leader of a group like ours was killed, the Romans tended to wipe out his followers. That's why we locked the door as best we knew how. You've got to understand our minds and our hearts were all over the place – we still held on to the wonderful memories and experiences we'd had with Jesus but these last few days had challenged us in so many ways

I ran, as fast as I could to get to the place where Jesus was buried. I'm younger than Peter and it was easy for me to outstrip him as we ran towards the tomb. Not that it was a race.

I didn't know who or what was inside the tomb so I just looked in very tentatively - there was enough light for me to see the outline of the clothes Jesus had been wrapped in. Just then I was pushed aside by Peter.

### **PETER**

That run really took it out of me; I'm not nearly so fit as when I was fishing every day (except the Sabbath of course). I wonder too if my denying Jesus (as he said I would) had knocked me about more than I thought. How could I have been such a fool? How could I not have known? It seems a bit pointless to go over that right now. When I got to the tomb I pushed John out of the way (not unkindly I hope) and rushed to where Jesus' body had been laid on a kind of ledge. When I got in I saw his grave clothes and the cloth that had been wrapped around his head, blood-stained naturally – he'd had a real going over. No body, no Jesus. How could they have done this? What low life would come into a grave and take the body away, without any clothing?

What did it mean? I just sat there crushed! Then John came in.

### **JOHN**

We didn't talk much when I finally came into the tomb. But there were the grave clothes; they no longer contained Jesus' body, and I noted too the cloth that had been wrapped around his head. I know it's crazy but at that point I couldn't come to any other conclusion other than Jesus was alive. Such a belief was preposterous I know – but I couldn't deny what my eyes saw. Peter wasn't quite so sure; we kind of ambled back to join the others. We didn't talk much, lost in our different thoughts. I was trying to remember all the times when Jesus spoke about what would happen to him – I realise now I wasn't listening too carefully, it all seemed a bit fanciful to me. Had I missed something?

### **MARY**

After John and Peter left, I just sat there outside the tomb broken-hearted, the tears flowed, the future looked so dark and hopeless. I decided to go back into the tomb once more, just in case there was a clue, something I'd missed.

Well, I wasn't expecting this; two men dressed in white were sitting where Jesus had been - pure white, radiant white, frighteningly white.

They guessed I'd been crying and asked me why. I said pretty much what I said to the apostles, **'they have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him.'**

When I turned around there was a man standing there, I didn't know who it was, this was getting pretty strange.

He too questioned me, **'woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'**

I thought it was the gardener so I asked him if he'd taken Jesus' body away and if so where had he put it because I'd find a way of bringing it back to this tomb.

Then He quietly said my name, **'Mary.'**

I can still feel the shivers that went up and down my spine at that point. **It was Him, it was Jesus!** When I reached out to him he put his hand up and said no, not now, not yet – then he said

**'Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I'm ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'**

And I went, no I ran, to declare the wonderful truth **'I have seen the Lord!'**

### **Reflection:**

In these Easter morning encounters we have a clear illustration of how people respond to Jesus today

**Peter** - still not sure, still wondering, looking at the evidence before him. Still not totally convinced (and as an aside not really looking forward to seeing Jesus after all his bravado and subsequent moral collapse just two days – he'd really identify with Steve Smith and company). My observation is that mostly it's not about evidence it's about not willing to be challenged by how we live, and what's important to us.

**John** - easily saying he believed even if he didn't get it, even if he didn't understand all Jesus had said to them. We can believe in Jesus without understanding just who he is and what he requires of us; it's nice but when pressure comes it's too easy to crumble.

**Mary** – well, she met Jesus – and there are dozens of people here today who can remember when and where Jesus became a living reality to them.

So where are you this Easter morning? You've might have come because you've been invited, or because it's your custom to be in church on Easter Day, or you're in town to help paint the town Ed or because Jesus the risen one is the living reality you're building your life on.

### **Have you ever thought about it like this?**

The way the Gospel writers tell it, Jesus came back from death not in a blaze of glory, but more like a candle flame in the dark, flickering first in this place, then in that place, then in no place at all. If they had been making the whole thing up for the purpose of converting the world, presumably they would have described it more the way the book of Revelation describes how he will come back at the end of time. But that's not the way the Gospels tell it. They aren't trying to describe it as convincingly as they can. They are trying to describe it as truthfully as they can. It was the most extraordinary thing they believed had ever happened, and yet they tell it so quietly that you have to lean close to be sure what they are telling. They tell it as softly as a secret, as something so precious, and holy, and fragile, and unbelievable, and true, that to tell it any other way would be somehow to dishonour it. To proclaim the resurrection the way they do, you would have to say it in whispers: **'Jesus Christ is risen.'**