

Good morning! Christ is risen – he is risen indeed! It's great to be sharing with you this Easter morning; an Easter like none other – but perhaps one in which our emotions over the last few days have matched those of the disciples some 2000 years ago. And we pray that into our darkness – the hope and reality of the resurrection will once more transform our lives.

Father God, open our ears, our eyes, and our hearts that we may hear and receive your Resurrection Word, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Easter story begins in darkness and it's in that darkness that Mary rises – but she probably hasn't slept at all the last couple of days. She's broken and distraught. She longs to be with someone who had been there in her desperate times – who had brought her joy and healing - but now he's gone and the isolation and the fear of the day faces her. All she can do is go to the tomb in despair, to pay her last respects. It is so dark.

My family's shared memory of Easter Sunday is that sooner or later Mum would come out with "The sun always shines on Easter Sunday". In her latter years it became a race as to who could get in and say it before her. But would the sun shine this first Easter morning?

For Mary, things just seemed to get darker. She had braved going out in the darkness but what she saw through the dawning light was worse than her fearful nightmare. True, she had worried so much about how she could anoint Jesus' body when the tomb was so well sealed – but now, through the gloom, seeing the huge stone which had barricaded the entrance gone, she ran away in fear.

She didn't stop for a moment to think or even explore if there if there could be a rational explanation, far less a miracle! All she could see was an even greater dishonouring of Jesus – his body stolen.

She runs and disturbs the other disciples, in isolation due to fear, with the awful news. Peter and probably John race to the tomb. Everything now is happening in a rush. No one seems to take time to think or ponder. Is that why they missed what was really happening?

Isn't that so often true of us? Our lives are so rushed! But I wonder if the last couple of weeks have given some of us time to slow down and begin to see things differently? Or if we'll take that opportunity this coming week.

Peter charges into the tomb while the other disciple stops to think. Strange, the grave clothes are still there... but that's all they see – before they leave.

Now Mary takes time to stop while her tears flow uncontrollably. Eventually she builds up courage to stoop down and look inside.

Strange - she doesn't see the grave clothes but two angels in their place. Why hadn't the men seen them? Had the angels only just arrived? Is it Mary's fanciful imagination? Or could it be that God meets us in a unique and personal way when we stop, stoop down and come to him, humbly with all our brokenness?

The angels don't tell her about the resurrection – they simply ask a question – why are you weeping? God meets with us just where we are; he knows and cares for us in our sorrows.

Maybe things have got to you this week. I admit I've shed some tears; tears with those who've lost loved ones; tears as I struggle in the isolation with the lack of physical contact.

But Mary wasn't ready to hear any response from them. She turns away in her sorrow, tears freely flowing. She is distraught. But God doesn't leave us alone in our sadness. He knows, he is alongside us – waiting to reveal himself to us – in a new way - to share his love with us – when we are ready.

Once again someone asks her – why are you crying? But Mary can't be bothered to look up; why is a man, a gardener asking her? Had he stolen the precious body? She rants at him.

And He just lets her do it. He listens.

While writing these words I was interrupted by the phone. It was an elderly friend distraught from losing her close sister from the virus; grieving but also filled with guilt that she hadn't been able to communicate with her sister in her last days and feeling very much isolated from the rest of her family. I didn't know how to respond so I simply shared what I had just written – Jesus standing with her in her tears.

Then Jesus says just one word – Mary.

She had heard her name so many times before but never had it meant so much to her or touched her in such a deep way as it did then. The realisation of who was speaking dawned on her. It was none other than Jesus – her lord and master. Jesus was alive! The sun had well and truly risen. A new day was beginning! Jesus is alive!

Possibly the greatest moment in our lives is when we hear God calling us by name. When we know that we are truly loved by him, even hugged by him, accepted and forgiven. When we realise that we are precious in his sight and he wants to surround and fill us with his love – when we hear him say – You are my precious child.

It was a moment that Mary wanted to hold on to forever. And while the realisation of Jesus being alive would transform her life forever, there was an immediate action for her – a message to take to his disciples. Jesus is alive –and would ascend to his Father – and theirs; his God and theirs. Somehow his death and resurrection had brought about a new, close intimate relationship with God which previously only Jesus had. Now it could be theirs! What a message! What a hope! God and people in perfect harmony – restored to all that He had made them to be. This is the resurrection story! Is it your story?

All that we are going through at the moment, the darkness, the isolation, the stress ... will pass. The sun will rise. Things are going to be different in the future and none of us know how.

But I wonder if we will come through this time transformed by the resurrection? Our selfish thoughts and attitudes nailed to the cross. Will we rise - no longer focussed on ourselves and our own interests – but renewed and learning to see things from God's perspective? Confident of our Father's love, being transformed into his likeness, assured of the future and ready to share his love with everyone?

I pray that it would be so. Amen

Rev E Blackmore

The apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Colossae -

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you.

Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life.

When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.