



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 55

Sunday 4th April 2021

Today's reading

John 20: 1–18 (“The Resurrection of Jesus”)

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. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

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| 1 | <i>Jesus Christ is risen today</i> (CH410) | 2 | <i>Jesus is risen, alleluiah!</i> (CH:409) |
| 3 | <i>Praise to the Lord</i> (CH:124) | 4 | <i>Were you there</i> (CH403) |
| | 5 | <i>Thine be the glory</i> (CH:419) | |

In the Name of the Father and of

Poor Simon Peter. He had reached rock bottom, and all on account of his own stupid fault. If he had just stayed up north in Galilee, all would have been well. He would have kept his old fishing boat and led a quiet life, mending those nets, hauling in the catch and generally minding his own business. The life of a fisherman was difficult and dangerous, but you generally didn't end up making a complete and utter fool of yourself.

Looking back on events, it was hard to imagine how it had all come about. There were, of course, those two words: "Follow me." But there had to have been something else too – something more: a sense; a conviction that this guy had something about him. That certain *something* that made it all but impossible to say no. Recalling just how badly things had unfolded, maybe it would have been better ... yes, it would have been far better had he just stayed firm and told that man to find another follower. But that's not how it had happened.

Peter had said yes, and that's just exactly how a big long train of events had led ... well ... had led to this: a darkened room with shutters on the windows and a great big bar across the door. (Not that these would do much good holding back the forces of Rome if they were to come searching for accomplices.)

"Do you remember," he whispered to John, slumped on the table opposite, "do you remember all our high hopes of how he would make a scene in the Temple, rally the troops, stage a coup and call down righteous vengeance from on high?"

"Aye, Peter," his friend replied. "And not without good reason. That man had power, and we saw that power with our own eyes. First the raising of the wee lassie in the house of Jairus. That was no magic trick, I'm telling you."

"You're right there," said Peter. "And what about the day we went up the mountain? As he prayed to God there was a glow all around him, as bright as whitest linen. Then Moses and Elijah turned up, and we were all beside ourselves..."

At that moment, James joined the chat: "Mind it was all we could do to stop Peter setting up camp and staying there on the hilltop for years and years to come."

"I can't deny it," said a rueful Peter with the makings of half a smile. "I'd have done it then, and I'd do it at the drop of a hat right now, if only I could roll back the days."

The big man's eyes fell to the cup tightly clenched between his massive hands.

"Come on brother." This was Andrew, the last of the four in that dark, cramped room. "You mustn't blame yourself. We're none of us heroes in any of this ... none but *him*, of course. He did what he had to do, and he did it with so much bravery, right up to when they came to lead him away. And don't forget that *you* were the one who chose to find him at the big house where all the priests were meeting."

Peter shook his head. "Some good it did me. Some good it did *him*. I got spotted behind enemy lines, didn't I? And I just froze – didn't know what to do. So I denied ever having known him. Not just once or twice, but three times. *Three times*, guys. And that was when the rooster raised the dawn, and his words came flooding back to me like a tidal wave..."

"Before the rooster crows today," mused James, "you will ..."

"Like I need reminding," snapped his friend.

Just then, there came a tiny sound: a coded knocking that spoke of friend, not foe.

The four glanced at one another. "That'll be Mary," said one. "Let's see what she's found."

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

Poor Mary. She had risen in the depths of night-time after the Sabbath restrictions were safely in the past. Through deserted city streets she had sped, quiet as a mouse, alert to signs of danger. At last she had got to the graveside, though she hadn't stayed long.

'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,' she stammered, "and we do not know where they have laid him.'

Peter looked at John, and the pair nodded one to the other: "Time to go."

Off they sped, with no thought of caution. At first they ran side by side but soon Peter fell behind. Reaching the burial ground ahead of his friend, John anxiously looked into the chamber. There were linen wrappings to be seen, but that was all. Mary had been right.

Just then Peter panted his way up, stumbling into the cave. The graveclothes were there alright, and a head-covering too, but there was no Jesus. His body was missing.

As the men struggled to make sense of what was laid out before them, Mary caught up and stood outside, weeping. She could hear their feet scuffing along the dusty floor, but she kept her distance. In time, the two friends emerged into a fresh spring morning and gave a glance in Mary's direction. Then they set off for home, wrestling with their thoughts.

All alone with her own thoughts, Mary could make no sense of what had happened. Hadn't crucifixion been enough? Did they really have to steal the body so no-one could find it ...

"Mary!"

"Teacher!" she exclaimed, turning herself right round, hardly daring to believe her ears.

A period of death had changed in an instant to a moment of new life, which came with a name ... Mary's name. Out of the depths of confusion sprang Resurrection, not as some clever idea, but as a personal experience, there for Mary in her hour of need. This was not a time for recalling prophecies or predictions. Neither was it necessary to think deep thoughts about what might be happening, or how, or why. This was a fleeting instant in all of human history: a point in life for realisation and rejoicing, like never before.

She raised her eyes to take a proper look at the man she had wrongly taken to be the gardener. And in her wrongness she was absolutely right. Just as Adam had tended a beautiful space, raising plants and shrubs, flowers and blossom in abundance, so too this Second Adam was engaged in the act of raising and tending and bringing on fruitfulness: the fruitfulness that flows from Easter's beautiful, gracious dawn.

This sermon is based on a short meditation: "He called my name", written in 2020 by Tony Robinson. In it the writer concludes with this captivating Easter thought:

Perhaps you too have heard your name called, by One who spoke so powerfully to you that you too knew yourself summoned from death to life. It might have happened in church. It might have been on a hike. It might have been as you looked into the eyes of someone you loved. It might have been at the birth of a child or as thunder and lightning heaved the heavens. And it might have been in the depths of a pandemic.

Note this: called by name changes everything. But you don't stay there. "Don't cling to me," he told Mary. Let me go, and you too must go. With every call comes a commission, a task. That's the way it is with this God. Every turning moment turns us outward, toward the journey, toward others who need us, toward the world that needs us.

Praying for others

God of fresh beginnings,
On this most joyful day of Easter celebration,
we recall before you all those who are in need of any kind:
people who are living through this time of pandemic in fear,
or in grief, or in illness;
people who grieve the loss of a loved one
whose place in their lives has been so special;
people whose lives are spent as carers,
little noticed in their life-changing work, and little valued by society;
people who are suffering in selfless ways at this time
because their love costs them so much.

Bring your Easter love, Lord,
revealed in the Risen Christ here with us this Resurrection morning.
Bring that love, we pray,
so that all might see the hope of new life in him.

The Lord is Risen: He is Risen indeed!
Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers how we have helped others:

A couple of weeks ago I talked about our donations from our “Away” funds. These donations are passed to Christian organisations which work in international healthcare. Last time I told you about EMMS International. Today I wanted to tell you about Christian Aid. We donated £1,280 to them from our Away funds donated during 2020.

Christian Aid believe that everyone is equal in the sight of God. For over 75 years, this has inspired them to stand together with our most marginalised global neighbours. They work in 37 countries, with people of all faiths and none, to stand up for dignity, equality and justice.

They seek to eradicate extreme poverty by tackling its root causes. Together with people living in poverty, Christian Aid believes they can create a world where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. The aims of Christian Aid (together with their supporters and partners) are: to expose poverty throughout the world; to help in practical ways to end that poverty; and to highlight, challenge and change the structures and systems that favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised.

Some of Christian Aid’s recent appeals have focused on climate change and Coronavirus. You’ll hear more about their climate change appeal later as this will be the focus of Christian Aid Week in May. Their Covid appeal helped raise funds to help vulnerable families protect themselves against coronavirus. Soap, masks and hand sanitiser are vital weapons against Coronavirus. But in many places, families can’t afford these essentials. They can barely afford to eat. The appeal helped to distribute vital hygiene kits to those in desperate need of protection.

Our donation, if used for such hygiene kits, could help 256 families. I hope you’ll agree that’s money well spent.