



Jeremiah 31:1-6

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Acts 10:34-43

John 20:1-18

In writing and reading, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

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

I first saw the image above on Good Friday. It is a picture of a pilgrim trying to visit the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and finding only a locked door. The Holy Sepulchre is the place which is believed to be the place of Jesus' burial. It is now a place of churches for a myriad of denominations, usually full of the noise of worship and pilgrimage.

At first, the image shocked me deeply – the crisis we are living through has even caused Jesus' tomb to be locked, I thought.

Then I looked again at the picture and realised that it might be a contemporary version of what Mary Magdalene expected to see

when she visited Jesus' tomb, very early in the morning while it was still dark.

When she arrives it is the very fact that the tomb is no longer sealed by a stone that shocks and distresses her. The fact it is not locked, but open. By the time she gets to Peter and the disciple Jesus loved she is in fear that Jesus' body has been taken somewhere else.

Their investigation of the open and empty tomb doesn't reassure her and she remains in the garden as close as she can get to the last physical presence of the one she loves, and overwhelmed by grief. Here she is the companion of all who are living through the immediacy of loss.

As she weeps she becomes aware of the presence of another person with her. Here is an opportunity to find out what has happened to Jesus, perhaps.

"Woman, why are you weeping" as she explains, the voice becomes familiar and personal:

"Mary", and she knows it is him.

And he tells her not to hold on to him but to go and tell his brothers, and so she does

"I have seen the Lord" she proclaims, released from her fear and grief to spread the news that God has raised Jesus from the dead.

The love that they have shared is given a new and fuller impetus, she is not just to hold on to him as he has been, but she will be at one with him in the new life he is bringing his friends, even as he appoints her as the first one to share it.

This life which has shattered the seal of the tomb, will have no problem dealing with the locked doors of the upper room or even later, the locked heart of the persecutor Saul who will join her in mission as the risen Jesus makes Paul the apostle of resurrection to a wider world still.

This is the life giving love of God, which Jesus shows is stronger than all that confines the human soul – even death itself.



This is a Russian Orthodox icon of the resurrection. It also came to my mind as I looked at the locked door of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre 2020.

At the very bottom of the image are pictures of broken locks and keys, smashed through by the wooden beams of the cross. In iconography they stand for the imprisonment of death and hell, and we see Jesus leading Adam and Eve and their descendants out of confinement into his glorious new life. The resurrection is understood as a new creation, a new beginning.

In commenting on a modern version of this classic icon, Rowan Williams notes that in the tradition Adam and Eve are depicted as figures who have aged, who have life's experience etched on them. (Just, I think, as Mary Magdalene experiences the resurrection of her beloved Jesus with a face stained with tears of grief). He talks of the way the resurrection is not a wiping out of our history and experience, our pain and failure, but it is about how all this can, in God's love be transfigured and made beautiful:

The re-creation, the new beginning of resurrection... is the planting of newness and freshness, beauty and vision and glory, in faces like yours and mine, in lives like yours and mine, in Adam and Eve as they are there depicted. And that is why the resurrection is good news for those in the midst of what seems to be incurable, intractable pain or failure, in the middle of a world or an experience where, practically speaking, there seems so little hope. It's not that the risen Christ appears saying, 'By magic I will take away your history and I will smooth out your faces'; but that the risen Christ says, 'In the depth of this reality I will speak, I will be present and I will transform.'

Jesus tells Mary not to hold on to things as they have been, because he is ascending to his Father and our Father. In his appearances in the days to come he will show that he is no longer confined by locked doors, by time or location but that he can come to transform any reality: fear and disbelief in a locked room, disillusionment on a walk home, a fruitless night long fishing trip with his presence. This is the way things will be, this is what the love of the risen Christ brings us.

Our health minister told us this week that our front doors are our best protection from the spread of Covid 19.

The resurrection shows us though, that our closed front doors are no obstacle to the risen Christ. On Easter morning the tomb was open and empty because Jesus was no longer there, because he is risen, and no locked doors will change that.

Right now, we don't have to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre or even our own local church, because the risen Christ can find us, right where we are. Whatever feelings we, like Mary, are overwhelmed with; however bleakly we might mistake his identity when he comes to be with us, the resurrection promise is that Jesus wants to transform all that we are going through with his life-giving love, and to draw us into sharing the message of that hope.

So may the message "Alleluia He is Risen" ring in your homes and your hearts this Easter, and may the presence of the risen Christ with you, help you share with him the message of God's life-giving love for the world whenever you open your door.

God of glory,

By the raising of your Son you have broken the chains of death and hell; fill your Church with faith and hope; for a new day has dawned and the way to life stands open

In our Saviour Jesus Christ

Amen

(a Collect for Easter Day)