

## ***Rejoice!***

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### **Readings**

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#### **John 20:1-18**

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. <sup>2</sup>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.' <sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

<sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes.



<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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.' <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>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.' <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup>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." ' <sup>18</sup>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.

#### **1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup>through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least

of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup>Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.

***Thanks be to God***

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## Reflection

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### Reflection

Let's pray...

God of life, open our hearts and minds to the moving of your Spirit in our lives. Help us to hear your call to us today.

As the women saw the empty tomb and ran to tell their friends,  
may our experiences of your love prompt us to live lives that shouts your love into all the world.  
Amen.

The passage we have just hear from 1 Corinthians is one of the first accounts of Jesus' resurrection that was written down. Paul's letters to the early church pre-date the written gospel accounts. The gospel accounts were certainly circulating by word of mouth, but they were yet to be recorded in writing.

So Paul's account is important as he reminds the early church of what is "good news", his words beginning to shape the early creeds of the Church.

I should say that already, we can see a little of Paul's bias as he conveniently leaves out the detail that the gospel writers include of the women being the first to find the tomb empty, and of Mary encountering the risen Christ in the garden. We'll come back to that.

What Paul does offer is what comes next - Jesus appearing to lots and lots of people - people who, in Paul's time, were still alive (15:6), the implication being that "you can check with them if you don't believe me".

In addition to those who physically saw Jesus after he had risen, Paul then speaks of his own experience - his encounter with the risen Christ, not in the flesh like the others, but an encounter that nevertheless changed his life forever (Acts 9).

And it is this encounter, that speaks to all of us who come after the lifetime of those who saw the risen Christ in the flesh.

It is the encounter with the risen Christ in a vision or in spirit or in some "other than physical" sense that speaks to the experience of all of us here today.

Which is why the experience of the women in the garden is also so important.

It is early on the day after the Sabbath has ended, around dawn, when they make their way to the tomb with the spices they need. They are finally able to attend to the care of Jesus' body that had been left in order to honour the Sabbath according to Jewish law and custom.

They wonder about whether they will be able to remove the tomb stone, but when they get there they discover that the stone has already been rolled back and the tomb is empty!

They go to tell the other disciples - someone has taken Jesus' body away! (20:2) And after Peter and another disciples have come to see the empty tomb for themselves and then head back home - having seen but not yet understanding (20:10), Mary lingers near the tomb, distraught and weeping (20:11).

She looks inside the tomb, and sees two angels, God's messengers, who speak to her and ask her why she is weeping, but they offer no answers (20:12-13).

And then Mary realises there is someone standing with her.

He speaks to her but she doesn't recognise him.

She thinks it is the gardener.

How does someone not recognise their friend?

Mary and Jesus had been friends for a long time by now - they had travelled together, shared meals together, she had listened for long hours to his teaching. How does she not recognise him?

Grief, perhaps. Having accepted his death, as she seeks to prepare his body for burial, perhaps she has no expectations.

Or is there something about Jesus that is different?

For me, Mary's experience encourages me - for all the times that I fail to recognise the risen Christ standing right in front of me asking me to respond to the needs of others, all the times we miss the Christ pointing us to new ways of being and doing, all the times we simply don't recognise the voice of the Divine in someone unexpected, perhaps also when I take this beautiful part of the world for granted and fail to hear the voice of the Creator crying out in distress.

It is when Jesus speaks her name that Mary recognises who it is.

Mary responds by naming herself as his follower, his disciple - "*rabbouni*" or "teacher" (20:16).

She recognises Jesus, her teacher, and names herself as one of his followers.

Then Jesus sends her to tell the others. "I have seen the Lord", she tells them (20:18).

The appearance of Jesus after his death, the raising of Jesus from the dead, is God's "yes" to humanity.

If Good Friday is humanity's "no" to God. If Jesus' death is the result of humanity rejecting the kingdom, the way of being, the relationship with God, he offered, then Easter is God's "yes" to humanity, indeed to all of creation. And what Paul reminds us is that Jesus continues to appear to people in all sorts of ways.

The raising of Jesus from the dead, and his appearing to the disciples and other followers of Jesus, says that God has not finished with us yet and that even when we reject God's son, God will still seek us out, call us by name, and Love will have the final word.

In opening the tomb and raising Jesus from the dead, God transforms expectations beyond our wildest imagining! It is almost as if God says to us, "what if...?"

What if - the powers of this world don't get to win?

What if - life really can come from the darkest of places - even that place when all seems lost?

What if - hope lives?

What if - love wins?

What if - all that you have learned to expect from this world can be transformed in the blink of an eye by the love and grace of God?

What if...?

As we celebrate the life and love of God we remember today in the raising of Jesus the Christ, may you hold to the "what ifs", may you hear God saying "yes" to you - and may it transform your living.

Let's pray:

God of Love and Life, open our hearts to your Christ appearing amongst us. Help us to be alive to your "what ifs", and transform our living so that this community may radiate your love and life to the world around us. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

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