

Sermon Year C = St Michael's Louth  
Easter Day

Real life is sometimes so unusual that at times we can barely recognize it. Occasionally – just occasionally we get a glimpse of something so special, so almost indescribable that it touches us with awe. The birth of baby for example, listening to a perfectly performed piece of music with all. I have always been in awe of the sunrise in the morning, and when I used to work in south lincs and commute from the north west I would see every week the beautiful, absolutely enormous skies in Lincolnshire – a vast open space, a sky which goes from one side to the other as far as you can see, that makes you realise just how small I am in comparison. All of these things have about them a combination of the ordinary and the completely mysterious that strikes at the sight of a sunrise. In labour, you know that what will come out will be a baby, but that tells you so little about the completely new character inside, even using ultrasound techniques – the new born baby is still a complete surprise – utterly familiar – yet utterly strange.

Early on Easter morning, whilst it was still dark, Mary went to the tomb expecting the stone to be across the entrance, but what she did not expect was to find the stone rolled back. This gospel tells a wonderful story of a seeking women, who is surprised by what she finds – in awe of what she finds, only bettered by the One who finds her. In this passage, Mary has three important encounters with others in the garden – the two disciples, the two angels, and with Jesus - what has become of the corpse and who might have taken him.

Mary's anxiety is natural – she arrived at the tomb early, perhaps for a time of painful grieving, for beginning the slow, painful process of coming to grips with the absence of one she deeply loves. Her tears are right on the surface. She is obviously in a terrible state, her eyes full of tears, and her imagination full of macabre visions of death and fears about what will happen to the body. She is utterly single minded in her search for the dead body of her Lord, to the point where even a meeting with a pair of angels becomes uninteresting unless they can give her the information she wants.

But none of these seem real explanations of why she does not recognize Jesus. Her mind is full of pictures of the man standing beside her, and yet she does not know him. Mary's closed world (and ours) is broken when Jesus calls her name. It is Jesus that gives Mary the gift of sight, the gift of being able to connect the new life with the old. Something illogical, impossible, and unnatural takes place. The One who was dead, and now alive greets Mary, the established rules as to what can happen have been overthrown – it is a new day. In finding the door open, the risen Jesus had given them the opportunity to life with the risen Lord himself.

By ourselves we do not have the power to see or understand God's vitality. By ourselves we live our life as best we can – a life about separation and death. But Jesus gives the gift of connection to the only true life, the life of the creator, which is about unity and sharing in the utterly real life of God. God wants to share his life with us – it is implicit in everything he does, from creating us to redeeming us.

Life is a gift reflecting the giver. Jeremiah puts into God's mouth the words "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you (v3) and that is the heart of it" We are loved into existence and our continued existence is not our doing but a demonstration of God's continuing commitment to us.

What we need to do is to respond – just as Jesus calls Mary, he also calls us – each one of us – individually. We need to respond so that we are in relationship with Him, finding time to listen to him, to talk to him – to let him into our life – because he loves you.

As Christians we are an Easter people – our faith is based on the events of Easter not Christmas. For we worship a God whose own son overcame death and rose again to take our sins upon his shoulders. For the son of God to be born was amazing, but if that was all that happened the story would probably have ended there and no more would have been heard. His dying and rising on the third day destroys death, through His resurrection. It is the hope of Easter.

Easter means  
he offers you a new beginning,  
a new world for you,  
and a new you for the world,  
new peace, new light, and new perspectives,  
a new lease of life  
today.

The Christian hope of new life is not based on a kind of blind and meaningless optimism. On the contrary, all our hope is scarred with the wounds of the cross, and it is only hope because of that. It is hope that God is indeed God. God is the creator, the course of all life, and nothing can make him not our God.

Yesterday when reflecting on this sermon I came across a Confirmation card. The card had the following words written inside “Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened”.

So when the angel speaks the words of life and joy to us, let us believe and go and tell others. That through the death and resurrection of Jesus the door is not slammed shut. That as one door slams shut, the Lord moves to throw open another. This is the message of hope that comes at Easter. The inexhaustible hope of Easter –

He Has risen,

He is not here.

He has risen indeed.

Alleluia. Alleluia.

