

## Easter Day 2021

Happy Easter to you all!

I want to compare the two Gospel readings we may have heard over the last two days. For those of you not at the Vigil Service yesterday evening, we heard the account from Mark of the resurrection, in stark contrast to today's narrative from John. In Mark, a young man dressed in white is sitting in the now open tomb, and tells the women not to be alarmed, and that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee, where they will find him. They are alarmed, not too surprisingly, terrified and amazed, and they flee in fear; and this crucially, they tell no one what has occurred.

Now contrast this to John – the disciples arrive at the tomb, see the crime scene, as it were, but not understanding, return home. Mary Magdalen stays put, sees Jesus there but mistakes him for the gardener. He speaks and there is recognition. Mary goes back to the other disciples with her news.

Common features are the human touch – surprise and fear, a mistaken identity; and the major role of women here, the men frightened perhaps that they would be targeted for further reprisals. Uncommon features are that if we only had Mark, we wouldn't even have that, as since they told no one, there was effectively no real resurrection at that point. We would not be here at all. Mary gets it wrong to begin with, but the penny drops, and I imagine her hurrying, scurrying back, disbelieving but joyful, to tell the others.

Both versions speak something into our lives today. The uncertainty and anxiety reflected in Mark has been the framework of our lives for too long now – firstly the endless process of Brexit (and not really over yet) with the pandemic hot (fever hot) on its heels. What those women felt, we have been feeling. And those of us who are generally comfortable might remind ourselves that this is the normal situation for large numbers of people: those who go hungry at night, those whose livelihoods are precarious, those fleeing war and political oppression, the Uighur people of China ... We have been 'degrounded' to use Judith Butler's phrase: the ground is shifting and we have nowhere secure to put our feet.

What do we take from John? The human factor of course. Jesus says to Mary initially, "Why are you weeping?" but also the certainty of the resurrection, which the evangelist goes on to describe in more detail later in the Gospel after this garden encounter: with Jesus in the upper room, a picnic on the beach, in dialogue with Peter. There's something else here too. It's a bit like those *Where's Wally?* books where Mary doesn't really see Jesus to start with, he's not where she expected him to be. And often Jesus is not where we expect him either – that's the trouble, he won't be constrained by us just to be in church, he's now gone very techy and we find him on Zoom, among us as we pray. And especially in the last 12 months, we've seen him in nurses, in care assistants, especially in doctors whose skin colour is different from most of ours, in those locally 'feeding the five thousand', in key workers, and so on.

As Christian people this Easter, our mission (not impossible but still demanding) is to resist being like the women and running fearful and silent; but rather to be Mary, spotting Jesus in unlikely places and telling others about the new hope, the real resurrection.