



Opening Prayer Easter Sunday

Lieut-Col. Terry Grey | April 2020

Drawing upon the Lectionary Readings

Matt 28:1-10 or John 20:1-18)

Since the events of Friday,
the cross has remained firmly grounded in the soil of our hearts,
yet even now, three days later,
there remains no stench of death.

God of Easter hope,
the fragrance of life infuses the air
because your steadfast love endues forever!

We, who are dispersed across location and place
are as one,
overwhelmed by the magnitude and breadth of your grace.
Love that risked all
in the face of rejection by the very one's for whom your life
was spent.
Yet you became their salvation,
you have become our salvation.

On the cross your arms were spread wide
not because of rusted nail,
but because this is the way
that you have chosen to embrace the world through death.

Yet we, your people, are buoyed with an expectant anticipation
of seeing you risen here among us this resurrection Sunday,
wherever we are.

Lord, our desire is to share your resurrected life.
Not to save our own skins,
but because we have come to learn
that you designed life to be about community and not self.

We long to share your resurrected life
because we live in a world that is increasingly becoming
a place of fear, of grief, of hopelessness.

Risen One,
we abandon ourselves to your infinite love again,
so that the world might recognise
that the people of your Church
are people of the resurrection.

This is a marvellous thing in our eyes,
for we realise that it can only be your doing.

In the name of the Christ,
through the Spirit we pray.
Amen



Easter Message

Colonel Winsome Merrett | April 2020

John 20:1-18

Have you ever thought: “Wow, that’s an opportunity I missed”? Perhaps it was the opportunity to connect with a long-lost friend, climb a mountain, grab a one-off bargain or attend a significant event. Today we will consider some potential missed opportunities relating to Mary’s seeking after Jesus.

Mary Magdalene’s life had been transformed through her relationship with Jesus. This Scripture tells us she was on her way to the tomb very early in the morning. John’s gospel references it as still dark. Mary was going to anoint his body, to offer one last act of love for the one who had changed her life and given her a future.

Mary is walking towards a place connected with death, a place associated with grief and sorrow. She does so in the dark, also symbolic of her night of mourning and the darkness of her unilluminated understanding.

Little did she know that as she walked in her darkness and in the dark towards a place traditionally connected to grief – her world was about to be brilliantly overcome with the light of the resurrection reality.

There are a number of opportunities presented to Mary in these next few hours for her to begin to sense this new reality. I see four opportunities for Mary to begin to sense a new reality: that the body she was searching for was no longer a body, but a resurrected Saviour.

Even today, God in his grace, gifts us varied opportunities to grasp the depth and breadth of what it means to live in the reality of the resurrection presence of Jesus. How often, like

Mary, do we miss these opportunities to point us to the presence of a living Saviour because we are looking for the wrong thing or because we are consumed with the struggle of our own circumstances and concerns.



Mary misread the rolled away tombstone. Mary is looking for a body. She had seen Jesus die. She had seen where they laid him in the tomb. The rolled away stone meant his body had been removed. No other possibility occurred to her.

Sometimes we are perhaps looking for a specific answer from God and fail to see the response he is providing to our prayers or our needs because it lies outside our expectations.



The second opportunity is missed because it appears that the disciples, who Mary ran to speak to upon discovering the tomb stone rolled away, did not share their insights with her after they had entered the tomb. We read that Peter and John sprinted to the tomb, where they discovered the grave clothes lying neatly folded in a way that left them wondering – perhaps a mystery, yet to be explained. There is no sense that in their observation of the unusualness of the way the grave clothes had been left, that they said anything to Mary.

Sometimes people may miss out on the good news of a living Saviour because we remain silent instead of engaging in conversation. Even when we don't have clear answers, our entering into the struggle with others to express our faith in difficult circumstances can point others to a compassionate, living Saviour.



The third opportunity comes as Mary looks into the tomb. Two angels are now present and ask why she is crying. In her grief and inability to see

anything except that Jesus' body is missing, these messengers of light do not have any impact. Mary doesn't miss a heartbeat in the face of two angels speaking to her, but stays focused on finding Jesus' body, so she can anoint his body and assuage her own grief.

Sometimes, it is like we don't hear God even when he metaphorically "shouts" at us for attention. We remain focused on our personal agenda, missing the wonder and mystery of the message of a risen Saviour walking each day with us.

We are not so unlike Mary: followers of Jesus as she was, serving him, involved in doing good deeds, perhaps proving our love for him, but overwhelmed with care and anxiety and grief.

But in attending to our personal agendas and busyness in life, we miss opportunity after opportunity to grasp the reality of the presence of the resurrected Jesus among us in our lives and circumstances.

Mary missed three opportunities which pointed towards a new reality. And except for the intervention of Jesus, she would have missed this last opportunity as well.



After missing the significance of the angels, Mary turns and sees a person she assumes is the gardener who asks her two questions. But Mary, instead of directly answering those questions, responds with her request for him to show her where he has put Jesus' body. She doesn't recognise Jesus.

Another, more obvious opportunity almost missed.

But Jesus simply says her name: "Mary!" Jesus' tone and his use of Mary's name strikes a chord of recognition and familiarity within Mary.

Someone has said that the word, "Mary" is the

shortest sermon ever preached.

What did it convey? Hope, love, redemption, grace, a future, life. It conveyed personal relationship, it conveyed the reality of the presence of Jesus.

Mary has found the one she had been seeking – despite the missed opportunities – and in doing so found so much more than she expected. In reality, Jesus found Mary.

Mary's story is now changed, her agenda is changed, her grief is removed, the heavy burden she has been carrying is gone. She experiences a new reality in her world because Jesus, whom she thought was dead, is alive and present and interacting with her.

In her pain and grief, what broke through was not the angels, nor Peter and John's ponderings about the mysteriousness of those grave clothes, not the rolled away tomb stone, not even, at first, the resurrected body of Jesus. What broke through her grief and pain was the use of her name by Jesus. In saying her name, he communicated familiarity, a "knowingness" of Mary, and hope and acceptance.

We, like Mary, may have missed opportunities to grasp the reality of the presence of the resurrected Jesus at work in our lives and in our world. Our faith might be weak or our grief might cloud our spiritual vision. We may have a restricted view of God, which limits our awareness of Jesus' living presence with us in the here and now.

But those who seek Jesus, even imperfectly, will find him. Because Jesus wants to be found. There is no "hide and seek" here. Even when we miss the signs of his resurrected presence among us, Jesus turns up, often when we least expect it.

Today, Jesus answers a prayer, he brings comfort to us through another person, his Spirit highlights words of Scripture for us, he points us to a magnificent sunset or the beauty of an opening flower, he challenges our thinking about his work in the world. He makes us uncomfortable by his Word

or the work of his Spirit within our lives. If we are actively seeking after Jesus, inevitably and ultimately, Jesus shows up. Today, he says your name ...

“I am here. You are loved. You have a purpose.”

Don't give up seeking the presence of Jesus in your life every day! Every day can be an Easter morn for the follower of Christ, seeking the presence of the resurrected Christ throughout our day.

Here's the postscript to this story of grief and missed opportunities:

The resurrected Jesus gave Mary the message of Christendom to share. The one who had either missed or misread the signs of his resurrection during that long morning, this woman with a past (albeit a forgiven one), this woman of faltering faith, to her – not Peter or John – to her he gave the mission of telling his disciples of his resurrection.

Do we understand how incredible this is? The most important message of Christendom was given to Mary. What Jesus saw wasn't her failings, but her devotion, her persistence in seeking until she found.

May that same persistence mark our seeking after the presence of the resurrected Jesus in our daily lives.

A personal encounter with the living Christ changes our world. It is not just an intellectual discovery, nor just an emotional experience, it impacts the essence of who we are. It becomes a relationship with the living God. The encounter itself provides the reason for the message. Christ is risen – it's a message worth living and a message worth sharing.