

Easter Life



The rising sun above is just appearing through the trees. All that we can see in the picture is being illuminated by that sun. It is an image of the way the risen Jesus gives light and life to all - an 'all' that includes human beings, animals, tall trees and even grass. It is dawn and the light is gradually spreading, but there are still many areas of darkness.

Sometimes we feel we are in the dark, overwhelmed by anxiety and problems out of our control. Alternatively, we may feel a bit like grass or weeds that no one notices and is of little interest to anybody except the odd chicken scratching around looking for food.

Lately, the extra demands, changes, mud, ruined pasture and destroyed possessions resulting from Covid-19 and the flood, may have left us exhausted and stressed. In this case, I suggest that the stories of the risen Jesus can speak to us.

Let us start with Mary Magdalene, who, full of grief was in a dark place both in her mind and in her world. She went before dawn, when it was still dark, to the tomb where Jesus' dead body had been placed by Joseph and Nicodemus, but to her horror the stone sealing the tomb had been moved. John 20:1-18 tells us that in her distress Mary hurried to tell Peter and the other disciple, 'the one whom Jesus loved', what had happened. The two men ran to the garden and each bent down and looked into the tomb. One man 'saw and believed'. The other did not. Then they went home.

Mary returned to the garden. This time she also bent over and looked into the empty tomb. She saw two angels sitting at each end of where Jesus' body had lain. They asked her why she was weeping. In the grip of her grief, Mary seemed not to notice she was being questioned by angels, and replied that the body of her Lord was gone and she did not know where he was.

Mary then turned from the tomb and was asked a similar question by Jesus himself who was standing there, but she did not recognise him. Thinking he was the gardener, she asked if he had taken Jesus' body away. Jesus said her name. Hearing her name spoken by Jesus, Mary immediately recognised her Lord and friend. The darkness gripping her began to lift allowing Easter light to start to shine in and around her. Mary passed through grief, despair, confusion and on to joy and delight! But this was not the end.

The risen Jesus who was with her, had work for her to do. She was directed to go and tell his disciples that she had seen Jesus and talked with him. Mary was not to stop and hold on to her Lord, but to become Christ's presence to others sharing her joy and the good news of the Easter new life with others.

In John 20:19, the story of the resurrection of Jesus moves to the evening of the same day. The fearful disciples of Jesus were huddled together in a room behind locked doors. It seems that Mary's message was not believed. We might imagine them saying, "She's become too emotional. How could she have seen a dead Jesus alive?" They were

perplexed, and scared that they too would be killed.

Suddenly, in their dark place was the risen Jesus. He did not begin by accusing his friends of desertion and betrayal, but by offering them the gifts of peace, light and new life.

Jesus proved his identity by showing them the wounds of his crucifixion. He was not a ghost but Jesus who had died and been raised to new life by God. The wounds also indicated that although he had triumphed over death and evil, suffering had been part of his journey to Easter life, as often it would be for his followers.

The disciples rejoiced when they saw Jesus and, like Mary Magdalene, they were given work to do. They were sent to tell others the good news of Christ risen, by words and lives based on loving and forgiving one another as Jesus had loved and forgiven them. To do this they received the gift of the life-giving Holy Spirit to guide and empower them.

The same Holy Spirit is also offered to us to strengthen and guide us in our lives as we pass through dark and light places. We may, like Mary, be focussed just on our own problems, or like the disciples be hiding behind locked doors for fear of revealing our vulnerable selves to others.

The story of Easter challenges us to be open to God's light, and to embrace the love and peace of life in Christ that we are given to share with all we meet. We shall do this in small everyday acts of kindness, in impressive heroic deeds, and in everything in-between.

Returning to our picture of the sun at dawn, the strength of the sun's light affects everything as it gradually reaches out into the dark to give light and life to all God's creation.

Whoever we are, and wherever we are emotionally or physically, we are all part of God's loved creation through whom the light and new life of the risen Jesus, the Christ, shines forth each day as we share love for one another.

*Sister Helen CSC
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