

SERMON for Easter Sunday – April 9th, 2023.

Readings: Acts 10: 34-43; Hymn to the Risen Christ; Colossians 3: 1-4; Matthew 28: 1-10.

As those of you who have been here throughout Lent are probably sick of hearing me say, I have been travelling these last several weeks, being mindful of two things. To listen to what Jesus is saying – to me, to any who will listen – and then process what I discern and see how I / we can respond.

One of the things which has really impacted me over the last week is how much love has infused all of Jesus' actions, particularly from the triumphant entry into Jerusalem then climaxing on the whole Maundy Thursday – Good Friday – Easter morning stories.

Jesus didn't have to enter Jerusalem, "humble and riding a donkey", he could have entered riding a horse, allowing those who expected to make him '**that** kind of king' to win. Imagine the scene which might have ensued ... Pilate, with a powerful armed guard entering the city from the west, Jesus and his disciples, also armed, also mounted, entering from the north!

Jesus defeated Satan's temptation to do something similar during his time in the wilderness. This was not the type of King he came to be, as he tells Pilate during his trial.

His kingdom is one of hearts and minds, not of earthly principalities. A kingdom of love, a spiritual kingdom, centred on God.

At our service on Thursday evening, we remembered that final meal of Jesus' human life, the washing of the feet, the institution of the "Last Supper", the new commandment which he gave us, to love one another.

The Creator of all that is, humbly washes the feet of his disciples, the act of a house slave, given in love, the sharing of a meal, given in love, and the commandment to love – love not as the world loves with its conditions, but as God loves, without condition, without limits.

Then throughout the time of his greatest ordeal, we hear nothing but love. No condemnation, no making excuses, but instead, finding a protector for his mother, forgiving those who were murdering him in the most painful, inhumane way, a long drawn-out torture, and sharing with the thief hanging beside him, the hope that they would be in paradise together. Deeds of love, messages of hope and compassion.

How did those closest to him respond?

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples couldn't support him for one hour.

During his trial, even Peter denied knowing him.

On the cross he was derided and scorned.

As I reflected on this on Friday afternoon, I was deeply moved by God's love for us. As the liturgy we used stated:

We give thanks for the amazing love of Jesus
the love that was wounded for our transgressions
the love that was tortured that we might know peace
the love that was crucified that we might live for ever
the love that rightly demands our souls, our lives, our all ...¹

So we come to today!

We start our day in the pre-dawn dark of the first day of the week, in the hush of a garden, at the tomb.

While all Jesus' male disciples may have deserted him, the women, who had followed him throughout his ministry, had watched to the bitter end, had seen where they had taken his body in the hours before the start of the Sabbath. Now they were here, at the tomb, to care

for his body, a last act of devotion on their behalf, to this man who had shown them so much respect, compassion and yes, love. Jesus had encouraged and empowered them far beyond the social and cultural conventions of his time. They now come to repay that with their love.

It is to the women that Jesus first shows his risen self to. All the gospel accounts agree, not necessarily who exactly was there, but certainly that Mary Magdalene was one of them.

In their faithfulness, in their devotion, their deep grief is changed to great joy. And so was the profound transformative power of this resurrection love.

Peter, who denied knowing Jesus, would find forgiveness and understanding.

The two disciples returning to their home in Emmaus would meet Jesus and would be forever changed by the experience. Their grief giving way to joy – enough to send them hurrying back the way they came, all the way to Jerusalem to share that news.

Even to Thomas, who questioned the accounts of the others, would come the blessing of a personal encounter with the Risen Christ. His doubts would change to certainty and he would be empowered to spread the good news of the gospel far and wide, even as far as India.

All who experienced the risen Christ and were changed, transformed by the experience, by the profound love which they experienced. We too can experience that transformation, which unconditional love brings.

This day of Resurrection brings many things: joy, hope, renewal, transformation, but, to miss quote Paul, the greatest of these is love.

Over the last few weeks, I have heard Jesus talk of and show me love.

What is it that is mine to do? What does the Lord expect of me ... of you?

To be loving, compassionate and caring people, serving others and living lives based on the model that Christ set out for us ... not an easy task, after all, Jesus was crucified for living the way he did!

But let us this day, make the decision to go into the world revealing that love in all its fullness.

For the glory of God and in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Acknowledgements:

1. Moira B Laidlaw, from her liturgy for Good Friday.