



The Right Revd Ian Paton
Bishop of St Andrews
Dunkeld and Dunblane
Scottish Episcopal Church

Easter Day

In the Resurrection story we just heard, Mary Magdalene mourning at the grave of Jesus is someone that anyone who has been bereaved can easily recognise and identify with. As someone person, caught up in another time of pandemic, the medieval Black Death, said about her, "She stood there because she loved, she wept because she mourned. She had nothing to lose. Everything she had was lost with Him. When He died, she died as well. When they buried Him, they buried her with Him."

She just wants Jesus back as she remembers him. Or, at least, she wants to put his body in a grave she can visit. So many people are feeling exactly like Mary today. So many people are grieving in this pandemic because they have lost those they love, a loss made even more painful when they cannot be with them in the last days and hours before they die.

That Easter morning, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene - in one of the most moving moments of the Easter story - and her first instinct is to think, yes, he is back as she remembers him, yes, she has hold of him after all. He has not disappeared, he has not been taken away from her. Everything can go back to normal.

But those who have been bereaved know only too painfully that there is no 'going back' in the face of their loss. Life can never be the same, you can't fill the gap left by someone you love, and you can't just 'pull yourself together.' Instead you find a way to live on, to live with the loss, to rely on the kindness and understanding of those around you, to find hope in the Resurrection we are celebrating today.

And what does the Resurrection promise? That God raised Jesus from the dead, and is the God who always brings life out of death, because God is Love, Love as strong as death and never defeated. So this sacrament of Holy Communion is not the memorial of a dead leader, it is where Jesus invites us to meet him, risen and living, as surely as Mary Magdalene did on the first Easter Day. We can all be met by the risen Jesus, whether or not we can share in this bread and wine now, he is present with all of us.

But this is hard to believe, because it is absolutely not what we expect. We find it hard to recognise it, to trust it, especially now, in the middle of this pandemic of death. We wonder and we doubt.

But so did Mary Magdalene and the other disciples. The Easter stories are full of people not recognising Jesus, doubting his presence, and questioning themselves. So Mary Magdalene mistakes the risen Jesus for the gardener, and the other disciples demand proof.

We are the same, full of questions and doubts, especially now. How do we know Easter is real? We can only really begin to know that Jesus is alive, when we make our own lives sources of life for others; when our words heal and encourage; when our actions show compassion; when we stand for justice and true peace. Easter is not real just because it is proclaimed in the bible and in worship: it becomes real when people are healed, consoled and strengthened by the life-

giving love of God. And we show we believe in the defeat of death by living fully now, with joy and generosity, even when life is hard and death is all around.

Jesus did not come with a great drum roll or make a big entrance. He calls Mary by name, quietly, without fuss or ceremony. And that is how she finally recognises him.

And so it will be for us as well. When we renew our baptism promises today we are like her, being called by name, as we were, quietly and lovingly, in our Baptism. Like her, we come to the tomb and expect to find death, but instead we find the signs of a new life which we cannot even begin to comprehend, but which God is giving us, now, in life, in death, and for ever.