

	<i>April 17 2022: Easter Day</i>	
	John 20: 1-18	
	<i>‘Risen!’ - Michael Brown</i>	

(Ukrainian Flags and Ukrainian Decorated Easter Eggs)

‘RISE HEART; THY LORD IS RISEN. SING HIS PRAISE WITHOUT DELAYES,’

From *The Temple: Easter* by George Herbert, Priest & Poet, (1593-1633)

‘The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.’ (John 20: 1)

Opening Stories

For those of us brought up on the Book of Common Prayer these words are probably ingrained in our thoughts and engraved on our hearts. Indeed, some of us may have attended an early Easter Day service actually in the dark! And afterwards like the disciples each of us went away again unto our own homes.

Whether the BCP reading was short by tradition or perhaps because of the long readings during Holy Week, this meant that we missed out on the story of Mary Magdalene meeting Jesus. But using our current scheme of readings we get what must be counted as one of the greatest passages in the entire New Testament.

God’s Secret Act

Millions of sermons have been preached about the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Millions of words have been written about the Resurrection.

In today's reading, gospel writer John manages to tell us *two* stories about the Resurrection in just over 400 words.

But that wasn't quite accurate, was it, to say that John (or any of the Gospels) tell us about the *Resurrection*? The actual Resurrection event is nowhere described in the Gospels for the simple reason that there were no witnesses to it. We have four differing accounts of *Appearances* of the Risen Jesus. No human being saw the Resurrection. Like the act of creation itself, the Resurrection is God's secret.

First Story: Mary, Peter and the Unknown Disciple at the Tomb (1-10)

Mary Magdalene, Peter and the unknown disciple find the tomb empty. More than this, when Peter looks into the empty tomb he sees not just the burial clothes but also the head covering lying in a separate place. This is a stunning detail which is often used as a special argument for the truth of the tomb being empty. But, of course, someone who doesn't believe this will simply say that it was a clever fiction.

People who have been life-long christians are not exempt from doubts about the truth of the Resurrection. A sudden personal tragedy, a family bereavement, harrowing news stories - all of these can upset the equilibrium of our faith. If that happens, what do we do? First of all, look at what you *shouldn't* do.

If you're able to attend church, don't stop. Don't sit at home worrying over this. Don't say to yourself, '*I can't be a christian now, I don't believe the right things*'.

Accept that you are not the first christian ever to have such doubts, and recognise that you will not be the last. Do what the Prayer Book tells you, seek counsel, open your grief to the vicar or '*some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word*'. Their pastoral experience is for you to call upon.

Second Story: Mary, Two Angels, and Jesus (11-18)

The disciples have left but Mary persists in her quest for what has happened to the body of Jesus. And she is rewarded - in a totally unexpected way. In her grief she looks around for help. She is not surprised to see someone she mistakes for the gardener as John tells us that *'In the place where he [Jesus] was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden there was a new sepulchre...'* (19:41). But she is more than surprised, she is overcome with joy when this person calls her by name and she recognises his voice. And this happens because Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, calls them by name, goes before them, and they follow him 'for they know his voice' (10: 3-4).

Conclusion

Professor Dale C Allison of Princeton has written a book of 365 pages (in small print and not counting the indexes!) entitled *'The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History'*. After examining a multitude of arguments on all aspects of the truth of the resurrection accounts, he says, *'I believe that the disciples saw Jesus and that he saw them, and next Easter will find me in church'*.

Why mention a book which is unlikely to be on our list of 'must reads'. After all, we probably don't sit around waiting for the next book on the resurrection from a learned scholar before we decide whether to attend church on Easter Day or acknowledge the day at home. But after all his labours, Professor Allison accepts that Christians do not believe in the Resurrection because some super-brained Hercule Poirot has investigated all the available facts, tested all the alibis, and given his OK.

And so why do Christians believe in the Resurrection? Perhaps because otherwise we would have no church, no New Testament, no Sunday worship. Perhaps because we have seen a gracious light shining in the lives of Christians we have known. And perhaps because like Mary Magdalene we have suddenly recognised that the Risen Lord is there in our lives. **AMEN.**

Closing Hymn

'There is a Redeemer'

1. There is a redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Holy One.

Thank you, Heavenly Father

For giving us Your Son

And leaving Your Spirit

'Til your work on Earth is done.

2. When we stand in Glory
we will see His face
And there we'll serve our King forever
In that Holy Place.

Thank you, Heavenly Father

For giving us Your Son

And leaving Your Spirit

'Til your work on Earth is done.

Words (slightly altered): Melody Green Tune: Keith Green

Epilogue



'This is my friend,
In whose sweet praise
I all my days
Could gladly spend.'

(NEH 86)

A HAPPY AND
A
BLESSED EASTER
TO
ALL OF YOU

Ukrainian Icon of Jesus - Orthodox Easter is *next* week