

**St. Ninian's Parish Church**  
**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2020**  
*John 20: 1 – 18; Acts 10: 34 - 43*

It won't last, I know that. But, while it does last, I appreciate it so much, although it has always surprised me.

There will come a time, probably at some point when he reaches his teens that my seven-year-old son won't want his father hanging around when he is at school or with his friends. But at the moment that is not often the case.

When I used to pick him up from nursery he would be squealing with delight when I arrived. That warmed my heart. Last year at school in primary one I would occasionally help out with the class. I thought the last thing my son would want was his dad hanging around. But, no. At six years old, he would still squeal with delight when I arrived. He still wanted me there.

It won't last forever of course, but, generally for the moment, most of the time, at the age of seven, even when he is having fun, having fun with me around is better than doing so without me. I feel loved.

Not so long ago a friend of mine went to a funeral. At the funeral the deceased's son stood up to say something about his father. This son is a great rugby player. He has played rugby for Australia at every level. At the funeral of his father the rugby player told the congregation why he loved his father. He said that throughout his life, for as long as he could remember, his father had come to watch him play rugby. No matter how unimportant the game; no matter how badly he was playing; no matter if the team was on a losing streak; no matter that his father had other things to do; no matter his father's fear that his son would be injured; no matter the weather, come rain or shine his father was always, always there on the side-lines to watch him play.

You see, as much as the rugby player enjoyed playing rugby, it was always better because his father was there. That's love, and his son recognised that.

On this Easter morning as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, his triumph over death in this dark world stalked by death, I want you to believe something. But, if you can't believe, then I want you to recognise something. I want you to believe or recognise that love is the most powerful force in this world, so powerful that it can overcome even death.

In the account of the resurrection that we read this morning from the Gospel of John there are, apart from Jesus, three characters: Mary Magdalene, Peter, and someone referred to as 'the other disciple', whom Jesus loved. That description is significant, because of these three characters present on the day of the Resurrection the one whom Jesus loved is the one who believes, the other two, Mary and Peter, are the ones who recognise.

Mary arrived at the tomb, she saw that it was empty, but she didn't understand why; she didn't believe. John writes,

*... Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed ... So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

Peter does the same. John records him running to the tomb and going inside. But, the disciple whom Jesus loved looked into the empty tomb and he immediately believed. John writes, *The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first... Then Simon Peter came ... and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head... Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed...*

In the account of the Resurrection in the other Gospels, the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, the disciples believe in the Resurrection because they are told by angels that 'Jesus is not here, he is risen.' No faith is required to believe in those other accounts of the Resurrection because, after all, angels don't lie.

But, in the Gospel of John's account there are no angels; there is only the empty tomb. So, it is on the basis of seeing the empty tomb alone that the disciple Jesus loved believed. He is the only person to do so. Peter and Mary didn't believe until later on when they see Jesus and recognised him. Prompted by angels, as in the other Gospel accounts of the Resurrection, Mary believes only after she has recognised Jesus presence. John writes,

*...she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!*

Peter doesn't believe in the Resurrection until, John says in the next chapter, 'some time later' when he, Peter, had returned to Galilee and was fishing by the lake. Only when Peter recognises Jesus there does he believe. In between times we have the story of Thomas, again a story of someone who only believes after something prompts him to recognise Jesus.

For those first followers of Jesus, people like Mary, Peter, Thomas, and the disciple Jesus loved, the resurrection was something to believe in. The disciple Jesus loved believed immediately without any site of Jesus or prompting. The others only believed after something prompted them to recognise Jesus: an angel, for example, or the site of Jesus' wounds, or an encounter in a familiar setting.

What was it that the disciple Jesus loved believed on the basis of the empty tomb alone? He believed that if the Jesus was not in the tomb, dead, then he must be in the world, alive. And he believed that, because he loved Jesus.

Today, that is what I want you to believe as well. I want you to believe, on the basis of your love for Jesus Christ, that if Jesus isn't in the tomb dead, then he must be with us in the world alive. It is important to believe because no matter how powerful the story of Jesus' life is, no matter how effective and moving and lovely and challenging the Gospels are, the world is only a better place if Jesus is here in it, alive. It is a worse place if he is in the tomb and dead. The story isn't enough on its own to make the world a better place; Jesus needs to be here. Just like that rugby player who made it all the way to the top. Rugby was only the best of games when his father, who loved him, was there on the side-lines whatever the weather; win, lose or draw.

When Jesus is alive and here, the world is a better place no matter what is going on in it. That is what the disciple whom Jesus loved believed, and that is what I want you to believe as well. That's the Resurrection.

But, I know you are probably not the sort of disciple that the disciple Jesus loved was. Few are. Few believe they are loved by Jesus in that way: Peter didn't, Thomas didn't, Mary didn't. You probably don't have that relationship with Jesus either, which means you can't simply believe on the basis of nothing more than an empty tomb.

I completely understand that. If you are going to believe in the Resurrection, you are going to have to believe in the way those other disciples did, Mary, Peter, Thomas. You need prompted to recognise Jesus' presence in the world, like they did. The empty tomb isn't enough.

It is difficult to recognise Jesus alive in the world. Many have struggled. Mary thought he was the gardener until he mentioned her name. The disciples on the road to Emmaus walked for ages without recognising him before he drew their attention to the Scriptures. To everyone he looked different; he was transformed. He is transformed today, that is why it is difficult to recognise him.

I don't know everyone who is watching this morning, but I do know that you are not the only one, there are many others. You are part of a congregation, a church, a community, a group of people in a communion of love with each other and with Jesus Christ who are gathered around the country today to celebrate Easter Sunday.

Whatever is happening in your life - good or bad - your life is better than it would be otherwise because you are part of this community; because you are in communion with these people, unseen, but present. Your life is better for the presence of everyone else watching this morning. That is true because we are not just a random collection of people gathered around screens on a Sunday morning. We are not doing this today because we all enjoy the same leisure pursuit - this isn't a virtual golf-club. Nor are we here today because we have been told it will be good for us to be here - this isn't a Joe Wicks fitness class, or a conference, or a virtual classroom, or a lecture; nor are we here today because we all uphold the same ideals - this isn't an online political gathering.

We have gathered together today as individual Christians in our own homes as part of a congregation because we love one another. That's how we know we are Jesus' disciples, because we love one another. Your life is better for the presence of everyone else watching this morning because I know that everyone else gathered today has your best interests at heart. Yes, sometimes it is a rocky and difficult relationship; sometimes there are short words and disagreements, but deep down everyone else watching today has your best interests at heart. Your life is better because we're here, and our life is better because you're here.

Together, we are the body of Christ in the world, transformed and alive. Recognise it and believe it; because your life is the better for its presence. Our life is the better for your presence. The world is a better place for our presence.

*Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.*