

## **Easter Day – John 20:1-18**

### ***'While it was still dark...'***

This is a day of celebration and rejoicing. But it's not how the day started – not on that first Easter morning.

As John tells us, it began *“while it was still dark...”* It began with Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb, grieving, because on the Friday her beloved friend and teacher had been brutally executed. With his death, her hopes and dreams had died too. And now, to compound the pain, his body was gone. She couldn't even spend some time with his mortal remains – caring for them and mourning her loss. It was all dark.

It's a very real picture, because that's so often how it is for us.

We know about grief – about aching loss, deep despair, the feeling of hopelessness. Someone or something that mattered deeply to us has gone, has died, has been lost. Or perhaps it's the darkness of self-doubt, of depression, anxiety, or some personal heartbreak. And then there's the darkness of a world caught in the grip of human injustice, bigotry, cruelty, and conflict. And yet, here we are, shouting our *“Alleluias”* – celebrating with joy the greatest day of the church's year.

So how does today relate to all this darkness? How does God meet us within it?

I accept the Easter story, not as a comforting tale, but as a reality, precisely because it begins in the dark. And that's because it's in the darkness that we so often meet God.

Good Friday showed us God entering fully into the darkness – God sharing our suffering, sharing our questions and doubts, sharing our inevitable death. On the cross we see God, in Jesus, with us in the darkest place we can go. And that's exactly where Mary Magdalene was.

Mary was outside the empty tomb, crying her heart out. *“They've taken my Lord,”* she said. Then a man, whom she assumed was the gardener, asked her why she was weeping and who she was looking for? All Mary wanted was for him to tell her where the body had been taken. But then the man spoke her name: *“Mary!”* And in that moment everything changed.

Stunned, she could only say, *“Rabbouni!”* – her favourite name for Jesus. It was a tender moment. Her name had been spoken, and she recognised who he was. The darkness lifted. Her beloved Jesus was alive.

Jesus – the light of the world – the light that shines in the darkness – had not been extinguished by human violence or cruelty, not even by death itself.

In the darkness Mary heard her name spoken.

The speaking of our name is far more than just a word uttered; it can be an immensely intimate, relational act. At our baptism, our names were spoken as water was poured over us, and we were named as beloved children of God – sisters and brothers of the very same Jesus whom Mary encountered in the garden. To hear a loved one speak our name speaks of relationship, history, and shared life. And that is the kind of relationship the risen Christ has with us.

What we celebrate today is a profound mystery. I don't pretend to understand the *“how”* of it all. But

what I believe, what I trust, what I give my life to – is Jesus Christ crucified, and now risen from the dead.

And this morning, as we come to communion – eating the bread of life and drinking from the cup of salvation – we too may hear, in our hearts of hearts, our name spoken. We may hear the risen Christ telling us that we are beloved; that in the darkness he is with us and will be with us always; and that not even death can separate us from his love.

That's what Mary heard, and in her joy she reached out to embrace Jesus. But he stopped her. "Don't hold on to me." If I were writing the story, I would've included a long, tearful embrace at this point. But this moment is how it needs to be. What matters is not that we hold on to Jesus, but that we know he holds on to us – holding us in a love from which nothing, not even death, can separate us.

Even in the darkness of death, he is there – somehow transforming endings into beginnings and declaring that death does not have the final word. And in this life, we are given foretastes – glimpses – of what is to come, as the risen Christ meets us again and again in our own dark places.

This morning, as we renew our own baptismal promises, know this: you are God's beloved daughter; God's beloved son. You are a sister, a brother of Jesus Christ, just as truly as Mary Magdalene was. As she met Christ in the darkness, so he desires to meet you – offering a new beginning, and a new hope.

Easter is not the commemoration of something that happened nearly two thousand years ago. It's about meeting the risen Christ today. It's about discovering him in the darkness today. It's about hearing Jesus speak our name. It's about being led into a new life and new hope. It's about knowing God who is love, who holds us for all time and for all eternity.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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*– Waiapu Cathedral, 5.4.2026*