

Sermon on John 20: 1-18

Easter Day – The Courage to Keep on Living and Loving

So, on Easter Day we ask ourselves, what does the world need now?

Jesus had died, all was lost, so it was thought.

But then Mary discovers an empty tomb and someone she thought was the gardener asks her, ‘Why are you crying?’

They have taken my Lord away.

And Jesus says to her ‘Mary’, he calls her by name and her eyes are opened and she recognises him.

But he then goes on to say to her, ‘Don’t hold onto me... go instead to my brothers and tell them...’

And she races off to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord!’

She comes face to face with the risen Jesus but his resurrection is something to be told, shared, offered to the disciples, and then to the world.

Not something to hold onto.

We can’t hold onto faith as if Jesus is a possession of ours.

Mary must have the courage to keep on living, keep on loving, in the light of the new life of God, as we must.

The courage to let the resurrection glory frame who she is as time moves on.

The courage to let go.

To let go of fear, to let go of unkindness and unforgiveness, to let go of grudges and hate, to let go of anxiety at what others will think of us as we live in the generous love God has poured out on us.

Reckless generosity as Francis Spufford put it.

The courage to be human.

For to be truly human is to reflect the image of God in which we were made and as the epistle of John reminds us, God is love, and we love because God first loved us.

As much as ever the world presently needs a community which has the courage to keep on living in the face of fear and terror.

It may be hard to grapple with the mystery of the resurrection as it is a mystery.

Mary's reaction of astonishment and bewilderment is pretty understandable.

Yet she doesn't hang around to weigh the pros and the cons.

She doesn't take out her forensic microscope to examine its veracity.

She doesn't run and hide and keep her head down so as not to have to take a stand on things.

She responds with the courage to share the amazing news she can barely believe.

I have seen the Lord.

Jesus is risen from the dead.

A new day has dawned and you won't believe who I've just seen... or maybe you will.

Just imagine if she hadn't done this.

The disciples may not have heard and all of history might have played out differently.

She has the courage, the faith, to keep on living.

Not to hold on too tightly, to protect herself, her reputation, her life.

And in her example we find our calling to live in this way too.

To have the courage to keep on living even in the face of a pretty broken world.

To have the courage to keep on loving in an oftentimes pretty unlovely world.

We mistake courage sometimes as something reserved for battlefields or sporting grounds.

But truth be known it comes down to being willing to take a risk for the sake of truth in order to offer hope.

The disciples could have completely disregarded Mary's report.

Seen it as fanciful or deceptive.

Her reputation could have been tarnished.

But she takes the risk because she is compelled by what she has seen and heard.

She can no longer keep it in.

She runs, she speaks, she reports, and nothing is ever the same again.

For us, the courage to keep on living can take root in our lives, and may be reflected in 1000 different ways, small and large.

It may be found in the persistence of parents or grandparents making sacrifices each and every day to raise their children faithfully.

It may be in the offer of forgiveness to someone who has hurt us.

It may be in seeking to love the difficult person whose presence and actions always make things awkward.

It may be in looking to encourage rather than criticise when we're generally a critical person.

It may be in encouraging our governments to act more compassionately for the poor.

It may be in simply taking time to be with someone who is grieving or lost and letting them know they are not alone.

It may be in refusing to reciprocate anger for anger, violence for violence, hate for hate.

Like the resurrection itself, all such acts of courageous living, of courageous faith, open up on the world God's way of new life and new love.

Of life and love holding sway over death.

I have seen the Lord, Mary says, and in every life lived in this way, we likewise get a glimpse of the Lord who has risen from death among us.

The church is called to be the community that commits to courageous living and loving for Jesus' sake, every day, every week, every year, and always.

But it is also the community that names courageous living and loving for what it is.

It says, you know how you love your kids or your parents or your friends or your neighbours or even your enemies... you know how you sacrifice your

time or money or energy, you know how you offer your gifts in acts of beauty that enhance the lives of others, none of that's a fluke of nature.

Not some random goodness spliced into the dangerous drama of the world like a movie edit for effect.

It's a reflection of the God who loved the world so much that he sent his only son.

It's a reflection of that same son's willingness to die, and it's a reflection of the power that raised him from death, so that it could never touch him again... ever.

It's a reflection of the divine love.

And even if you don't realise it yourself, don't worry, the community of faith realises it, and will name it for you... we will say, in you, in your courageous living and loving, 'I have seen the Lord!'

The resurrection of Jesus doesn't avoid the hard things.

Jesus suffered and died before he was risen.

He has been through the heartache of Gethsemane and Golgotha.

Christian faith doesn't shirk the hard stuff of life in order to call forth new life.

On the contrary, it says, God has walked, and will walk with you through the hardest things of your experience, and all the way to death, but that is not the end.

There is more to come.

If Christianity had ended on Good Friday it would have ended in despair.

But God's great exhaling of life raises Jesus to new life showing once and for all that suffering is not the last act in this great divine drama of love.

Not some human dead end which runs down the drain of despondent inevitability.

Jesus suffers freely so as to say, I will let the powers of darkness do their worst.

And by taking it all in, he drains all its power out.

And life triumphs over death.

Living as a resurrection people, in the light of God's new day, and new life, is the calling we then receive.

Like Mary, as a people of faith, we too must say, 'I have seen the Lord!', and in our words and deeds go and tell the world about it.

Wherever you've come from, whatever your life and experience, your ups and downs, your joys and sorrows, having the courage to keep on living and loving is what resurrection faith is all about.

You may think that it's beyond you.

What difference can your example possibly make?

Well, quite a bit as it turns out.

In a world of terrorism, of death and destruction, of self interest and self promotion, the world needs a people who will take time with the little things as well as the large.

And be willing to say, 'death is not the end', 'I have seen the Lord!'

Finding this courage is not beyond any of us.

It takes great faith, but then we have a great saviour.

For, like Mary, the risen Christ stands in our midst and says, 'Do not hold onto me', 'Go and tell my brothers and sisters of a love stronger than death.'

In all you are and all you do and all you say, have the courage to keep on living and loving, to the very end.

And when the end comes, I will be there with you.

Friends may the joy and strength and power of Jesus give you hope to live this way for all your days, now and forever.

Amen.