Easter Day – 20 April 2025

Message – Christ made visible in us

Creator, Redeemer, Giver of New Life, open our hearts and minds to see you. **Amen.**

John chapter twenty is about seeing and believing. The gospels give us a glimpse of the turmoil that was going on in the hearts and minds of those who saw Jesus that first Easter Day. John tells us about the experiences of Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the apostle whom Jesus loved, whom I am going to assume is John, though it is never stated.

And, had we continued, we would have heard of Jesus's appearance to the disciples in a locked room, except of course to Thomas who had to wait another week, so finally also of Thomas seeing and believing in Jesus.

The context for these experiences was set back in chapter twelve, just before John's account of the last super, with a quote from the prophet Isaiah:

> *"He has blinded their eyes*
> *and hardened their heart,*
> *so that they might not look with their eyes*
> *and understand with their heart and turn—*
> *and I would heal them." (40)*

A contrast is being drawn between those who reject Jesus and those who see, understand, and believe in Jesus.

It is at first sight difficult to link our experience today with

John's emphasis on seeing. Few of us will have a Damascus Road experience and see Christ with our own eyes. We only hear the stories of the gospel.

However, that is not the only revelation we have. We often refer to the Hebrew Scriptures as the Old Testament and the Christian Scriptures as the New Testament. We might be better to think of there being three Testaments.

God's oldest testament is creation. Many of us feel closest to God when in the midst of nature. God's first testament continues to tell God's story. Creation has a profound ability to create wonder, a sign of the presence of the divine. Remarkably, we are invited to join in the act of creation. Our own creative abilities can inspire and even create wonder in others to, whether through words, pictures, objects, or actions: God working in us.

The second testament is the Law and Story, Halakhah and Aggadah, of the Hebrew Scriptures. We can easily think of this testament as being all about God's Law, but the picture is far more complex than that. The story and other kinds of literature contained within the Hebrew Scriptures, and the ongoing interpretation of those scriptures, show them to be alive and relevant today. But beyond that, it is not the written word that was to be the testament to God but the people of Israel themselves. And, where we see Jews still seeking the truth, we see that testament today.

The third testament is the Life of Christ, which is captured in the New Testament, but which does not end there. It is

captured in the lives of Christians through the ages who are seeking the truth.

As Christians it is easy to emphasis the difference between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Testament of Christ. However, we must recognise that it is the same God who speaks and is revealed through all the testaments.

There are parts of the first two testaments, events and processes, of which we struggle to make sense. This struggle is important. For our faith to have integrity, we must wrestle with the realities of life, including those complex and tragic things that we would like to ignore.

Today, we are the embodiment of the third testament, the Body of Christ. Our faith is intricately interwoven with all who have believed through the ages. We in fact have all three testaments today to help us to see, understand, believe, and be healed. One might reflect that God is trying really hard to communicate with us.

The journey to faith is different for each one of us. The journey deeper into faith is equally varied. Nonetheless, we are also bound together as those who seek the truth and find that truth in the Life of Christ. We are able to support, encourage, and learn from one another on the journey.

In John chapter twenty we have six different variations on the journey to faith. Our first is Mary Magdelene, she ventures out to the tomb in the darkness. As the contrast between dark and light is one of John's themes, the darkness and Mary's lack of understanding are probably to

be seen as related. Seeing the stone rolled away Mary assumes that Jesus's body had been taken away.

Mary runs to share the news with Peter and John. John sprints towards the truth but pauses at the last minute. Peter's sprint may have been slower but he does not even pause on the threshold. We all go at our own pace. We need to make space for that and respect that in each other.

Luke tells us that Peter went away wondering at what had happened *(24:12)* and that Peter sees Jesus himself later in the day *(24:34)*. Peter needed a little nudge. Many of us need encouragement along our journey too.

John believed as soon as he saw though he still did not understand. When we believe, we do not suddenly understand everything about God's revelation in Christ or even about ourselves as children of God.

By the time that John wrote the gospel, he had reflected on all that took place. John's gospel has great depths conveyed in simple language. But that is not where John was on Easter Day. He believed but also didn't fully understand.

Our journey to deeper understanding is not in linear progression. What seems obvious to one person will pass another by. I at times feeling a little dumb in pastoral conversations when people say something that I have not realised but which is so obvious when they say it.

Our varied life experiences mean that we have learnt different things along the way. We need to be kind patient

with one another, and also attentive to what others might know that we have yet learn.

Mary Magdalene's journey is persistent yet stalls. Mary is fixated on the idea that someone has taken Jesus's body away, even after seeing the grave clothes and angels.

All of us can get stuck on beliefs that are not that helpful. For Mary, it is a gentle calling of her name that revealed the truth to her. Christ offered a simple act of compassion without judgement. Sometimes, all of us need such compassion in our misguided ways. We need to show such compassion to our fellow travellers, recognising that there are indeed logs in our eyes.

Further patterns are seen in the other disciples, in Thomas, and finally in *"those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (20:29)* Among these twelve people we see diverse journeys to faith and that our journey will be different as we will be among those who have not seen. And yet, we will have seen because the testaments are all alive today. Christ is alive today in us, we are a part of the third testament.

The is no right way to come to faith, other than the one that brings us to faith. There is no point in comparing ourselves with others. We can easily feel resentful that our journey of faith is not as easy as someone else's or doubt because we have not come to faith the same way as someone we respect or feel superior because we feel so much more mature than someone else. None of these feelings are appropriate.

We are all on our own journey, we can learn from one another and support one another but it is our journey and our journey is a unique gift from God to each one of us, which will in turn allow each of us to serve the body of Christ and creation in our own unique way. Together, we can allow others to see Christ today, just as the first disciples saw Christ that first Easter day.

May we be found in Christ and Christ found in us.

Amen. Amen.