

## John 20:1-18

Today is Easter Day, when we remember that Jesus rose from the dead. But what's it all about?

Well, the cross and the empty grave go together as the great act of God working in the world. This is God acting to save us. To save us from what? In a short answer, I could say to save us from ourselves.

It starts with a problem. God made us to live under his kingship. He gave us a beautiful world to live in and gave us everything we need. But then, our own egos crept in. We decided that we want to live our way, not God. We started to think of ourselves as being the most important and not God nor other people. The Bible calls this attitude sin.

Sin is like a tube of pringles. They are completely addictive. Once you pop, you can't stop. Sin hooks us in and before we know it there is no way back. We find ourselves cut off from God. We're unable by ourselves to live the sort of life that God wants us to live

Once we're hooked in, then we are a prisoner, chained and bound.

We cannot release ourselves.

But this is where the cross and grave comes in. You can't have the empty grave without the cross because Jesus needed to die. But equally, just the cross gives us nothing. If Jesus had just died and that was the end of the story.... How would that change anything? Jesus would just have died to know what it was like for us to die.

The resurrection matters.

The John version of the resurrection is my favourite one. It concentrates around Mary Magdalene. She is grief stricken at Jesus' death and just wants to honour him by properly preparing his body – there hadn't been much time on the Friday when Jesus had died. As with all the other accounts, we're given this scene of the stone having been rolled away and the panic settling in – what's gone on, where has Jesus' body been taken?

Mary runs back to the disciples to tell them and they rush to the scene, look around and leave again and so Mary is alone weeping in the garden. As she dies so, suddenly she spots two angels. Now, I think we can assume that at the time she didn't know they were angels as she just pours out her heart to them – "Jesus has gone and I don't know where they taken him."

And as she says this, she spots another person, one she assumes is the gardener. And it's at this point, with this conversation, that everything changes. With one word, with her own name being called, history, for her, changes - "Mary" – her eyes are opened to what's happened.

Pause and think for a moment. Replay the scene in your head but change the name for yours (pause) Imagine the risen Jesus calling you by name.

You see, the truth is that he does that for all of us, he calls us all by name. It doesn't matter how caught up by sin we are, it doesn't matter how much or how little we think of ourselves, Jesus calls all of us. He invites all to us to be a part of his resurrection story. The new life that was in him wasn't just to stay with him, it is for all mankind. To be part of this resurrection story we just need to respond in the way that Mary did.

She hears her name called, she sees the risen Jesus, and she responds in faith. "Teacher" she called out and she clung to him.

When we respond to the risen Jesus and when we turn to him, he does the amazing for us. He sets us free and gives us a new life in him. No longer bound by sin, no longer weighed down by the past, but set free.

The cross and the resurrection matter and they go together. This great act of love from Jesus gives us hope where there was no hope before. There is nothing that we can do in this life that the cross and the empty grave cannot forgive. God's love is just greater. Every day should be a day to remember it and give thanks for it, but equally each year we need to make that extra special effort to give thanks and commit ourselves afresh.

So, I would encourage each and every one of us to do that today. As you come up for communion, pause and remember what Jesus has done for you personally and give thanks. But also, there is a water in the font. And so, either after communion or on the way out, dip your finger in the water sign yourself with the cross and recommit yourselves this coming year to God's service.

And if you're thinking, well, I don't think I've ever actually asked for God's forgiveness but this year I want to accept it, find me at the end and I'll more than happily pray with you.