

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In the Louvre in Paris there is a painting of the scene of the cross. In the painting the stars are dead and the world is wrapped in darkness. In the shadows there is a kneeling form. It is Mary. She is holding her hands and lips against the bleeding feet of Jesus. We don't know if Mary ever did this, but we do know she was there so she could have. It's not surprising then that she wants to be there again. She was there that First Easter morning.

William Barclay tells us Mary came very early. The word used for early is a Greek word which was the technical term for the last of the four watches of the night that ran from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. It was still grey dark when Mary came, because she could no longer stay away.

When she arrived at the tomb she was amazed and shocked. Tombs in ancient times were not commonly closed by doors. In front of the opening was a groove in the ground; and in the groove ran a stone, circular like a cartwheel; the stone was wheeled into position to close the opening. Mary was astonished to find it had been removed. Two thoughts may have entered her mind. She may have thought that the Jews had taken away Jesus' body; that, not satisfied with killing him on a cross, they were inflicting further indignities on him. But there were ghoulish creatures who made it their business to rob tombs; and Mary may have thought that this had happened here.

Mary came in faith that day not knowing how it would be possible for her to get past the Roman guards let alone overcome the obstacle of a 2000 pound stone to enter the tomb. God took care of both! It is amazing how God surprises those who walk by faith. What's more he still moves stones!

One of the greatest promises of Easter is that no stone is too big for God to move. Mary was facing larger obstacles than just a rock – she faced doubt, fear, frustration, pain, grief. All the things she faced were too big for her. But not too big for God. That's also true for us today – there is no stone in our lives too big for God to move. As we face stones of frustration, doubt, fear, financial health or emotional crisis, it doesn't matter, no stone is too large for God to move, when we place our trust in him.

There's a story about a priest who took some thorns and laid them on the altar for his Good Friday service. He intended to remove them for Easter but he forgot. When he came to church that Easter morning he noticed that the thorns

had beautiful blooms on them, so he decided to leave them there as an appropriate symbol for Easter Sunday. Because Jesus lives, where there was death, new life is now possible. Because he lives;

- Dead habits from our old life that we struggle with and carry around like a back pack full of rocks can be lifted. God can release us.
- Because he lives we can face today and a thousand tomorrows because He will always be with us.

But why was the stone rolled away? Not so that Jesus could get out. He was in his resurrected body; he needed no open door to walk through. No, the tomb stood open so that we could look in, just as Mary and then Peter and John did; it stood open as proof that no body lay there. The cross and resurrection stand or fall together; for a cross without a resurrection is a cross stripped of any power.

For it is in this empty tomb we find the power of our faith. Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 17-19,

“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

Our faith is distinctive – we serve the one – the only one – who laid down his life and had the authority to take it up again. The one who is the risen and living saviour of the world – not because he said it but because the empty tomb proves it. Christ is risen! Once again we proclaim the awesome mystery of our faith!

If we keep the resurrection in the past – making it only a historical event, and arguing about the facts and details – we keep its transforming power at bay. It's easy to say "Jesus is risen", knowing it in our minds, without it having any impact on our lives. But, when we allow our hearts to be captivated by resurrection life – the all-embracing, empowering, inclusive, transforming life that transcends all evil and unjust forces that divide and oppress humanity – then we don't only say "Christ is risen", we live it!

St Paul, in his letter to the Colossians chapter 3 verses 1-14, puts it like this, ‘So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above ... As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another ... forgive each other

... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

As we rejoice again in the good news of the resurrection today, we have the opportunity to renew our baptismal vows, and to remember in the words of the 'Resurrection Hymn';

'... we are raised with Him, Death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered; And we shall reign with Him, For he lives: Christ is risen from the dead!'

Let us pray; Father God as we rejoice in the power of the risen Christ on this Easter morning, we give thanks that you loved us so much that you gave your only Son so that we might have eternal life. Send us out in the power of your spirit to live his risen life that all might know you as their Lord and Saviour. **Amen**