**To understand, to connect and to share.**

April 4 2021 Easter Sunday John 20:1-18

When I was a district nurse I was often involved in assessing the needs of new patients to our Service. It was remarkable how many of these would be referred on a Thursday. I would go out on the Friday and often needed to thoroughly but promptly ascertain their major needs, as many of them would need care over the weekend which involved a great deal of organisation and co-ordination. It was like a race to understand so that I could act.

This picture in John’s gospel reminds me of a race to understand.

**A Race to understand**

It begins with a very different tone to that which we usually see in this gospel. There is more running in these few verses than in the rest of this gospel. Mary runs to Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loves, Peter and this other disciple together run back , the second disciple outruns Peter, but then waits for him, Peter kept running and enters the tomb first. There seems to be an urgency about discovering what is happening, it is interesting, Jesus has died, why the urgency?

They clearly want to understand. The disciples have misunderstood what Jesus was doing on many occasions. This point was likely to be the pinnacle of their confusion. What was going on? Jesus has died. What are they to do? What is God doing?

Whilst at the tomb, their observations grow as each one enters the tomb. Mary saw that the stone had been rolled away and the body was not there. The disciple whom Jesus loved saw the grave clothes, then Peter went in and saw the head cloth as well as the grave clothes. The beloved disciple entered and we read that “he saw and believed”[[1]](#footnote-1) but it is unclear what he believes, it states they don’t yet understand about Jesus rising from the dead. The term used for believe here refers to becoming convinced or persuaded on the basis of what has been observed.[[2]](#footnote-2) Then the disciples just went home again.

**A Passion to Connect**

Mary is still there, and as she weeps, she looks into the tomb and sees two angels sitting where Jesus body should have been. Yet she still does not appear to understand that the hand of God is at work here. Then she looks behind her and sees a figure who she believes may be the gardener. Her weeping continues and she remains focused on where Jesus body has gone.

John never tells us why Mary went to the tomb that morning. In his gospel the treatment of the body has already happened, but Mary goes to the tomb. Perhaps she just went there to weep. Just to be there, as close as she could be to Jesus, nothing else mattered. She would never have thought that Jesus body would not be there. She was distressed, what could she do?

In the midst of this sense of urgency and anxiety everything changes with just a word. “Mary”. Suddenly, amazingly there is understanding. Jesus is alive! Beyond understanding there is connection. He is here, her teacher, her Lord, the One whom she followed, the One she was committed to. Mary’s level of discipleship caused her to be present at the cross and to be the first at the tomb the next morning. Her discipleship was stronger than death.

The three visitors to the tomb share an intimacy of relationship with Jesus. In one case we are never clearly even told his name. The “beloved disciple” is always referred to in this way. He is always identified by his close association with Jesus. This disciple embodies “the love and intimacy with Jesus that is the goal of discipleship” in John’s gospel.[[3]](#footnote-3) Peter shares so many special experiences with Jesus throughout his ministry, and Mary seems to quietly support Jesus ministry, and then her devotion shines through as he faces death.

**A message to share**

Mary came to realise that Jesus had overcome death, Jesus was still in control.[[4]](#footnote-4) The glorification of Jesus has been a pivotal theme in John’s gospel and here we see that Jesus continues on this path. He tells Mary to tell the disciples that he was ascending to the Father.

Mary was to be the first witness to Jesus resurrection. She was commissioned to go and tell his disciples, “his brothers”, as they were now identified. Jesus told her to tell them that he was going to “My Father and your Father, to My God and your God”.[[5]](#footnote-5) This phrase reinforces that “what was true of Jesus relationship with God was now also true for the disciples’ relationship with God”.[[6]](#footnote-6) Jesus death and resurrection transforms our relationship with God.

In a world often dominated by scientific logic, the resurrection sends us a “curve ball”. We cannot provide a scientific rationale for the resurrection. The empty tomb alone would not “prove” the resurrection, but producing the body of Jesus would certainly have refuted the resurrection. Christians in the first century did not believe in the resurrection because they could not find Jesus body, but because they encountered the risen, living Jesus.

The resurrection assures us that transformation is possible, newness and fullness of life is available to us. It assures us that God is still active in our world, that God’s kingdom has not disappeared and that God has not abandoned the poor and the marginalised. It encourages us to recognise that God’s resurrection power can enable us to live for God and to serve God and our neighbours.

Christians today share in a relationship with God made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. In this relationship we grow in our understanding of who Jesus was, what he taught and did, and most significantly how he shows us what God is like. In this relationship we share an intimate connection with God through Jesus. We experience God’s forgiving, transformative, enlivening love, bringing to birth within us a love for God and for other people. Christians today are also called to share how they have encountered Jesus, and to share the good news of Jesus love for us all with others.

1. John 20:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. J. Ramsay Michaels, *The Gospel of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament,*(Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2010) 991 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gail O’Day, “The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary and reflections” in Leander E. Keck (ed) et al, *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 840 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John 12:13; 14:30; 16:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. John 20:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gail O’Day, “The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary and reflections” in Leander E. Keck (ed) et al, *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 843 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)