

**Date: 21/4/19**  
**Occasion: EASTER**  
**Service: 10.00 Eucharist**

**Readings: Isaiah 65.17 – end; 1 Corinthians 15.19 – 26; John 20.1 – 18**

## **TALKING TO STRANGERS**

I don't know about you, but sometimes I will meet someone in one set of circumstances, then meet them again in different circumstances and find myself unable to quite place them or, which can be very embarrassing, remember their name. The context of the original meeting has clearly provided markers, clues, for recognising that person to such a degree that without them I am often stumped – and embarrassed.

So I'm inclined to sympathise with Mary Magdalene here. Admittedly, she knows Jesus very well, has undoubtedly been one of his closest companions, perhaps even a leader of some sort; she certainly stuck by him right to the end. So why doesn't she recognise him?

In a way that we might recognise, the circumstances of their meeting are radically different, so different that she couldn't possibly expect to see him – for the very good reason that she had seen him die. She has after all returned to the tomb to mourn him.

But there is more to it than that. If I meet someone in the supermarket, when the last time I saw them was at a wedding service, or funeral, they are nevertheless the same person – my sense of who they are is not fundamentally altered by seeing them in Sainsbury's rather than at Robin Hood Chapel.

So for Mary, it isn't just that she is seeing Jesus in different surroundings: it's so much more than that.

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What we proclaim as the Resurrection is us playing our part in working out what it means to say that when we meet Jesus in one another, in the words of life in the bible, in the broken bread and wine outpoured we are meeting the same person whom Mary followed and briefly failed to recognise in the garden on that morning.

In offering this proclamation it's worth remembering something about the encounter that is easily overlooked: a woman alone in a traditional culture speaks to a man who is, so far as she knows, unknown to her. Make no mistake, that took some courage. It may have been courage born of despair and bewilderment, but it was courage nevertheless. And because she is willing to speak to this stranger, she learns that he is not a stranger at all.

In troubled and uncertain times, for our own country and throughout the world; where the President of the United States and others who should know better regularly demonise immigrants and other minorities, where Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and hate filled and hateful language against women continue to corrupt our conversations as a nation; in such troubled and uncertain times we can learn something very important from Mary Magdalene – as she undoubtedly learned from Jesus – that speaking to strangers may well be a risk – but it is the risk of experiencing the depth of love and welcome that is the Resurrection. We should try it.

AMEN