



**Sermon preached by Revd Deborah McVey, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2026**

**Readings:** *Matthew 28.1-10; Acts 10.34-43; Colossians 3.1-4*

**Easter Day**

*"Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch." Luke 5.4b*

*We come before you God, in awe and wonder at all you have done in our lives. As we explore your Living Word show us what you need us to hear this very day. In the Spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

What a gift it is to live in the Northern Hemisphere! Easter's good news resounds with the natural world bursting into life once again. Gardens, grey and lifeless, transformed with the miracle of new growth; Spring once again works her wonders of recreation. The message of Easter in all four gospels is set in the Garden of Jesus' tomb. Gardens figure large in scripture. God created the Garden of Eden and saw that it was good, a paradise indeed. In ancient Persian, paradise originally meant 'walled garden,' think of the beautiful, enclosed gardens of the Persians kings. Hebrew, Greek and Latin have similar words extending the idea from a physical garden to a heavenly place, a place of spiritual, blissful experience.

Into this paradise the first human beings are created and the Biblical myth of humanity's turning away from God began. Our God of Love wept then as now - such beloved creation does not respond to generous love. Jesus' whole life, his passion, death and glorious rising show how much God wants to be with us, to show us the way of love, the costly way of love. God's coming to us in Jesus was God's answer to the forgetfulness of human-beings to the ways of God; to bring us back to the way God intended us and all creation to be. Holy Week has taken us again into the Garden of Gethsemane – where Jesus' disciples could not stay awake one hour to keep company with him. This Garden, the setting for Jesus' betrayal by his friend Judas, whom Jesus loved to the end. Loved as well as the thief beside him on the cross to whom he promised paradise. For Jesus' passionate love without limit demonstrated that no one is excluded from God's love, this love for all Galilee, for all corners of the world.

Love that will not let go.

That garden outside the city walls, corrupted by executions, was the hill of crucifixion where Jesus died and where his mother and the beloved disciple stood vigil with him; where the Roman centurion recognised God, where hope was born for a radically new way of living from which all fear of death is removed and all hope is given. Hope in Love that will not let go.

In such a disaster, how is it that we can glimpse hope and have certainty that all sorrow and fear are banished forever? Well, because of another Garden, the one in which a secret tomb was chosen to lay the body of Jesus Christ, where his body lay in the sorrow of death, where a massive stone obstructed any hope of visiting his body. Utter grief and times of waiting must be endured, by Jesus himself, similarly by his followers. Yet this garden tomb contained life and hope; it's the garden of the first human encounter with the risen Christ and with Love that will not let go.

Early in the morning .... we know the story so well, in different renderings from the four gospels, this is the story where power and Life overcomes death. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the garden, we assume from other accounts that they were hoping to be as close to Jesus as they could be, but this dramatic narrative describes a terrifying earthquake sufficient to enable an angel to roll back the stone before their very eyes. The angel's first words: "Do not be afraid." How hard is that? Anyone who has experienced an earthquake or life shattering news would have been afraid, fear is piled upon fear surely as stone is piled on stone. Of course the women were afraid, their beloved had died in unspeakable circumstances. What was their future? The tomb lay open before them, guards paralysed with fear at least, this angel knew why the women were there, "Come and see the place where Jesus lay'.

What an extraordinary message: Jesus has been raised from death. He is still alive! They must go on to Galilee to tell the disciples; there they will meet him! They run in fear and in great joy! Matthew's story leaps immediately to the place of meeting Jesus. He greets them echoing the angel: "Do not be afraid!" The two Marys grasp his feet and pay homage to the One who has given them everything, the one who alone can bring genuine joy to their fearful spirits. The One Love who will not let go.

There are times in our lives of fear and great joy, when we recognise Jesus, like the disciples, when we notice him in others, he greets us in different ways and invites us to take hold of him through the words he speaks, often through others. These times can be times of thanksgiving; our hearts are full. We too receive his encouragement; he tells us not to be afraid in any circumstance. This action in taking hold of Jesus' feet makes a stunning link with other occasions when feet are instrumental in the proving of love and faith. The woman at Bethany's anointing of Jesus' feet with oil and tears. The foot washing at the Passover meal, when Jesus shows his way of love in his last action for his disciples, before his death. The women needed to know that Jesus was really there, in body as well as spirit. Taking hold of another's feet is a powerful gesture, it is to place oneself in a totally vulnerable position, it is to say to the other, I trust and honour you, I have immense regard for you. It is never an empty gesture. This is a very physical moment; Jesus welcomes their embrace. He embodies Love that will not let go.

The women must have held those echoing words, "Do not be afraid." in their hearts as they ran to Galilee to tell the other disciples as they had been commanded. These women were the first to witness the resurrection and to tell the good news. The words, "Do not be afraid," thread their way through scripture and resound down the centuries into our lives. How marvellous that we have witnessed the first woman ever as Archbishop of Canterbury. Sarah Mullally was welcomed and installed in that magnificent Cathedral, her message too included encouragement not to fear, for 'with God nothing is impossible'.

How often we need to hear this and how hard it is always to trust. It has been my experience throughout this past winter to hear these words deep in my spirit and to find the initial fear I had at the start of treatment disappeared completely with the kindness and skill of those who treated me. This fact is inextricably linked with the prayers I know were offered by many and I thank God for you. In some ways I found it to be an adventure (Advent) as when I mentioned to a staff member that I used to work at Addenbrooke's they would ask where and as soon as I said I was a Chaplain, this opened up conversations involving life's struggles. I often felt I was meant to be there in that place at that particular time. It made deep sense of it all. Many here will have experienced sense of God-incidences, when one is open to the Spirit. God's Love will not let go.

Death will not have the victory. When we die, we will all be raised most powerfully with him where tears and sorrow will be no more. Pray that those who suffer in this world find comfort in these words. It is our task as believers to do all we can to relieve the sorrows of others and be bringers of comfort in as many ways as we can. Our Christ-like responsibility is to find him in those we meet who are needy or sorrowful, those who are poor, those bereaved, those in any of life's struggles, and act to make a difference, knowing we are part of God's transforming power, and that in the faces of others we see God. When we come to him with others in our hearts, take hold of his feet and worship him just as his disciples did at his resurrection. Such concern for others through prayer and practical action is a way of washing the feet of our brothers and sisters of whatever faith or none, as we model his unconditional love. Love that will not let go.

"Go and tell!" While we have life and breath we, Christ's Body, are to go and tell this story. It might be like St Francis that we tell the good news with our mouths shut, as often actions speak louder than words. But we must *always be ready when asked to account for the hope that is in us, with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3.15)*. It is good to share our experience of faith with one another, this is how we become bolder. This is where the house groups and lectio divina groups transform us, we are strengthened in faith through sharing and listening carefully to one another. This is an experience of the love of Christ, love that will not let go.

On this extraordinary day of resurrection we commit ourselves once again to the practices of faith, looking to Jesus and looking out with his eyes to those around. Here and now we know that Christ's Risen Body, in all its human vulnerability and all its divine power, will minister to our own frail bodies, our hidden places of concern and fear, so that with integrity we can minister his grace to others in every garden or garden-like place in the world we find ourselves. Let's take hold of his feet in confidence, greet him this day, praising him from full hearts, so may the assurance of his presence and the gift of his life change our lives and many lives this Easter tide.

Easter People - Christ is risen, he is risen indeed! Alleluia!