

This is the Good News-
The grave is empty,
Christ is risen.
Hallelujah

This is the Good News –
We paused to explore
and he called our name
Hallelujah

Hymn

Now the green blade rises from the buried
grain,
wheat that in the dark earth many years has
lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has
been:
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs
up green.*

In the grave they laid Him, Love who had
been slain,
thinking that he never would awake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps
unseen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs
up green.

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,

he that for the three days in the grave had
lain;
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs
up green.*

When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in
pain,
then your touch can call us back to life
again;
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have
been:
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs
up green.*

John Macleod Campbell Drum (1872 -1958)
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Prayer

Gracious God we praise you for this day of colour and vibrancy. After the muted tones of Lent and the cavernous blackness of Good Friday it is with relief and joy that we feast our eyes on the inviting colours of resurrection. As nodding daffodils declare the arrival of spring, so angelic voices stir the air with their chorus: "he is not here, he is risen"- and we dare to hope.

On this day we know ourselves to be on holy ground as we peep into the intimacy of you, the Godhead, and in death find life; in tears find joy; in scars find healing; in despair find purpose; in betrayal find forgiveness; in separation find belonging.

Praise belongs to you Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for Christ the Lord is risen today. Alleluia. **Amen.**

John 20:1-18

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen

wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look^[a] into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.



Sermon

Where do we start in our reflections this Easter morning? Surprisingly, perhaps, we start with **grief**. John's gospel account of the resurrection is a little ambiguous, but it seems that Mary Magdalene went alone to the tomb while it was still dark. Why did she go? You're going to tell me that she went to anoint the body of Jesus. BUT in John's gospel that had already been done. John 19:38-40 gives the details. A hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes is an awful lot of anointing material - as extravagant as the oil Mary used to anoint Jesus' feet at a meal time not long since.

No, she hadn't gone to anoint the body. Mary was grieving. That's why she went to the tomb. Alone of the gospels, we are told Mary was weeping. I know it's a hard ask on Easter Sunday, but let's just sit with grief for one moment –and we all know grief. These were dark times for her and for the rest of Jesus' followers. Mary's life had been transformed by Jesus and now he was gone. She was weeping. You don't need me to try and explain what grief feels like.

John writes: *Early on the first day of the week while it was still dark.* Easter starts in darkness, sadness, grief, uncertainty. And so often, that's life, isn't it? And that's death. Don't we grieve for the lives of children, women and men lost in Russia, Ukraine and other war-torn countries? For lives lost in the murky waters of oceans desperate people are trying to navigate? For the lives of our loved ones?

Easter Sunday acknowledges the reality of death and so begins with fear, grief, bewilderment, pain and searing loss.

Secondly, moving through the loss, resurrection became a **gradual dawning** for those early disciples – both women and men. It was a gradual realization. A gradual understanding. Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and noticed the stone had been rolled away . It would be a hard thing to miss, wouldn't it – a stone rolled away? Noticing this, she ran back for the men to

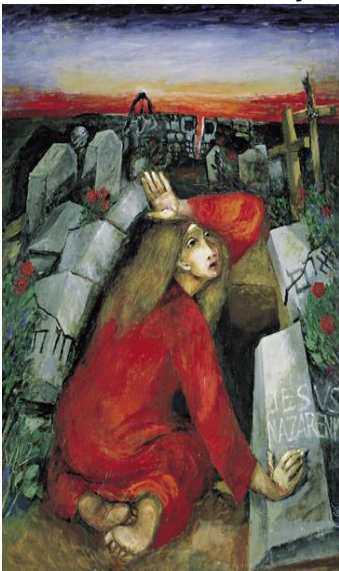
tell them what she had noticed, what she had seen. Certainly, a rolled away stone was of no more significance to her than – well, a rolled away stone. Resurrection was far from her mind.

Peter and John sprinted to the tomb. Peter went in to the tomb and saw the linen wrappings lying there, the cloth that had been on Jesus' head – rolled up in a place by itself – and, of course, no body. He began to wonder more deeply what on earth was going on. He began to try and work it all out. What did this mean? He didn't know, but he was starting to ask himself important questions.

John, on the other hand was much more on the ball. He went into the tomb and we are told he saw and believed – believed what? Well that Jesus had risen from the dead.

You see, John, when writing his gospel, is telling us that taking hold of the resurrection in our lives is a gradual thing. Taking hold of the resurrection takes us time and we go backwards and forwards between these different ways of seeing it and understanding it in our lives. Yes, we sing our hymns of triumph on this day – but we all want to see more of the resurrection in that most profound sense, don't we? Well, take heart, what John squeezed into a few verses about the gradual dawning of resurrection, takes a life time for us. It really does.

And thirdly, back to Mary and to her **encounter** with Jesus. The men go home. She stays, weeping as she looks into the tomb. In the half-light she sees something else: Or she thinks she does. Are they men? Are they angels? Who are they? They ask her why she is weeping – it must have sounded a strange question to her ears! The fact is that she is still convinced that Jesus is dead and that his body has been stolen, so persists in asking the question: where have you put him? She doesn't get an answer from those beings inside the tomb. Instead, something attracts her attention – or someone. Someone, perhaps, she saw from the corner of her eye.



And Sieger Koder captures this moment in this painting. Mary has turned. I think, she's just been called by her name and Koder captures the split second of her encounter with the one who is risen. The tomb is dark, the stones are grey. But as the sun rises in the red sky (sorry to you if you're looking at this in black and white!) there is light on Mary's face – a face worn with grief and tiredness but perhaps, with the stirrings of hope. She had encountered the risen Christ and became the first disciple to tell the others; I have seen the Lord.

Grief, gradual dawning, encounter. For me, these things sum of so much of faith. We bring who we are with our doubts, our fears our griefs – the stuff of life – and we come to an empty tomb wondering.

It is precisely in all of that stuff of life that, as we peer into the tomb, we see another out of the corner of faith's eye – we hear our name and we encounter the risen Christ. I encourage you, this Easter, to bring all of who you are to all that this Easter account offers so that you may know yourself to be called by your name; you may see through the tears shoots of joy and hope on the near horizon.

Prayers of intercession. We pray for those who weep today – tears of fear, of abandoned hope, of destructive loss. Tears that flow in places of war, earthquake, tornado, shootings. Tears that flow in

hospitals, GP surgeries, addiction clinics, foodbanks, pawn shops. Tears, the universal language of pain.

Crucified and risen Christ hear the cries of those who weep and stir us up to respond to them in your name

We pray for those who feel a heavy stone has been rolled over their dreams and their future. Those who can't pay their mortgage; those who can't clear their debts; those who can't afford to go to university/college; those whose business have never recovered from covid lockdown; those who cannot obtain a visa to stay in this country; those who are the victims of appalling crimes.

Crucified and risen Christ hear the cries of those who feel powerless and stir us up to respond to them in your name

We pray for Christians throughout the world today, including ourselves, as we celebrate Christ's resurrection. His life is our life and our hope. As we strain to hear him speak our name we know in the depth of our beings that we matter and are loved by you. May this inspire us to new encounters with him and with others.

Crucified and risen Christ hear the prayers of your people and unite us in our desire to look for you going ahead of us in our daily lives just as you promised. Amen.

The Lord's prayer

Hymn

See, what a morning, gloriously bright,
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
Folded the grave-clothes, tomb filled with
light,
As the angels announce, "Christ is risen!"
See God's salvation plan,
Wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in
sacrifice
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man,
For He lives: Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping, "Where is He laid?"
As in sorrow she turns from the empty
tomb;
Hears a voice speaking, calling her name;
It's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!
The voice that spans the years,

Blessing

Gracious God, through whom Christ was
raised from the dead, strengthen us to
walk with him in his risen life; and may
almighty God bless us, the Father, the Son
and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace
to us,
Will sound till He appears,
For He lives: Christ is risen from the dead.

One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
Through the Spirit who clothes faith with
certainty.
Honour and blessing, glory and praise
To the King crowned with power and
authority!
And 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!

*(Stuart Townend b.1963 & Keith Getty
b.1974) © 2003 Thankyou music*