

Sermon: *Our Light has come*

A.K. Sutherland, April 8, 2007 Easter Sunday

The light of day had not yet risen on the hill country of Jerusalem, on that first day of the week, but there were still a few who were awake. It was the first day after the week of the Passover festival, but for those who had followed Jesus to the Holy City and celebrated with him the Feast of Freedom had themselves fallen into the dark prison of worry and doubt.

Among them, Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons had been driven out in Christ's healing ministry. The gospels of Luke, Matthew and Mark record that she was accompanied by others including Mary the mother of James, Mary the mother of Joses, a woman named Jo-anna [who was the wife of King Herod's steward], and another named Salome. It was these women who had provided for the disciples and Jesus out of their resources during the course of Jesus ministry. Now they were preparing to provide one last grace from what they had, for the one who had raised them from their afflictions and given them hope.

The light of the sun had not yet rise above the line of the horizon when Mary Magdalene arrived at Jesus' tomb, yet in the haze of the pre-dawn something could be seen. There, on the crest of the hill, the entrance to the tomb was open. Perhaps in fear, and certainly in astonishment, Mary turned [the gospel writer Matthew presents this as an angelic inspired motion] and before the others ran to where the eleven disciples were gathered and in mourning for their teacher, their master, their friend.

No one had ever spoken to them as Jesus had, no one had ever given them so much hope in themselves. They themselves had not only seen the sick healed but had been sent out into villages to heal sick people as their master had showed them. It really had seemed that there lives had found purpose, indeed everything about their lives had been brightened. There was hope filling every parable that Jesus told, a hope that was mirrored in the faces of those who gathered to hear what he was teaching his disciples. Their bright and shining hope, snuffed out in a day. The day that – in tradition – announced to God's people freedom, was for them a day valed in by the betrayal of a one of their own, of persecution by the priests of their own faith, of looming clouds and a

stark landscape of a stone hill and three crosses at its peak. And there, at the top of that long climb was the man who had been a beacon for all their hopes and dreams cruelly extinguished. Then, as one buries the ashes after a fire, their beacon of hope was taken to a tomb, left to be guarded – not by Christ's faithful disciples – but by a band of foreigners. The Light of so many lives, buried and hidden, so none could see.

Jesus once said in a parable [Mark 4] <sup>21</sup>And he said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not on a stand? <sup>22</sup>For there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light."

Our Lord had shone upon that cross, thought the dimness of human spirits could not see it. The course of his life shone out for the whole of the Earth as he was poured out like water, suffering the curse of our affliction. So now, on this third day of darkness, the light of the greatest dawn the earth has ever seen from the moment God first called out into the nothing that was and said "Let there be light". No tomb, no boulder, no dark day, not guard, no doubt or fear, not even death could hold back the light of creation. As God had called out and brought creation into being, so he called out into creation and God's light shone more brightly than ever he has before.

And Mary's eyes lighted upon the gaping void of the tomb, and open her heart turned and ran to give the first sermon of the church in Christ's resurrection. Something had happened, someone had opened the tomb, things were not as they should be. Some of the disciples came next, running back to the tomb with Mary and indeed finding it empty ran inside. But in the seeming darkness a new light was beginning to shine for these disciples.

There were the wraps and shrouds neatly folded. If anyone was sneaking away the body they would not have taken the time to unwrap and remove the shroud, fold all of these cloths. This sort of thing would only be done when a body was finished with the cloths. And they would not have been folded, but bundled and destroyed. And like a light-bulb going off so came the words of God's messengers "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" [according to the gospel writer Luke]

But the Gospel writer John has Mary stroll of into the nearby garden to contemplate the scene, for though she has seen the signs that Jesus had risen, the fact of faith has not settled into her mind. In the garden outside the tomb Mary Magdalene

began to cry. For though the day was dawning and the reality of what had taken place on that morning was sinking in for some, for Mary the 'conclusion' to the sermon she had started when she ran to get the other disciples was still lacking a proper conclusion. Mary, like so many of us, had come to know the Lord of kindness and wise words and even a healing presence. We can accept a wonderful Jesu by all that he had done, but can we recognize the road to the cross, to the tomb, as continuing onto something else. There is no explanation for what had happened that morning. Mary was coming face to face with the challenge of everything she had dared to believe, and wonder the same thing Pilate had wondered when Jesus was on Trial "What is truth?". God had spoken through the prophet Isaiah to display the manner of salvation [53:3-5]:

"He was despised and rejected by men;  
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
he was bruised for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,  
and with his stripes we are healed."

And so also in Isaiah it also speaks of the effect this paschal gift of the one for the many, when he says, and we have read today:

"but **the LORD will be your everlasting light,**  
and your God will be your glory.

<sup>20</sup> Your sun shall no more go down,  
nor your moon withdraw itself;  
for **the LORD will be your everlasting light,**  
and your days of mourning shall be ended."

And in the shadow of her doubt she cannot recognize the voice of Christ when he speaks, "Women, why are you weeping?" In the midst of her mourning Jesus' death, tears filled her eyes as the deeper dark worry of the strange disappearance of His body and yet not his burying gown; and then she accuses this stranger, "And the fury of her anger rises in these words, "Where is it that you have hidden/taken my Lord?" She had dedicated herself to helping Jesus and even in this moment the dedication she shows to the care of his body is honourable in a sense, except it has kept her from letting her eyes receive the light. She can't see, he is right there with her, she is blind and deaf to who it is because she is caught up in what had happened and not what was going on for her right in her very midst.

And as the sun breaches the horizon, he touches her shoulder and says to her, "Mary"

Her eyes are opened by the truth, the light. Amen