

Easter Morning

On Easter Day 2020 we were not able to worship in church buildings because of COVID-19 restrictions nationally.

At around 4.45 that morning I went out into the garden and it turned into a meaningful Easter experience as I gradually realised that my situation was similar to that described in John 20: I was in a garden early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark. I imagined myself meeting the risen Lord and this became for me an almost sacramental experience. It made up for my disappointment at not being able to celebrate our Lord's resurrection with my Christian brothers and sisters in a church premises.

As we face another Easter Sunday where many of our church buildings are not yet open for public worship, the Vale of Stour Circuit offers the following liturgy and reflection. This can be used in a garden for anyone with access to one, or perhaps by someone sitting inside a dwelling but looking out onto a garden. If neither of these are an option then a suitable image of a garden could be used, or simply use imagination. It's not necessary for you to get up before dawn in order to use this reflection, though of course you can if you wish to.

May the blessings of our Risen Lord be upon you. **Martyn Filsak**



A Garden Liturgy and Reflection for Easter Morning

The Gospels tell us that after the death of Jesus, a man called Joseph, who came from Arimathea, asked for the body of Jesus.

John 19:41-42 ⁴¹ Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

That seemed to be the end of the Jesus movement. His confused, frightened and disillusioned followers mourned, but God had other plans. You may like to imagine yourself in the story that follows, as recorded by John the gospel writer. In the darkness and grief, you are met by Jesus, who calls you by name. You realise that there is no situation too challenging for Jesus to overcome.

John 20:1-18 The Resurrection of Jesus

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 toward 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.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

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 around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” 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,^[b] “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.



Hymns and Psalms 195

Good Joseph had a garden,
Close by that sad green hill
Where Jesus died a bitter death
To save mankind from ill.

One evening in that garden,
Their faces dark with gloom,
They laid the Saviour's body
Within good Joseph's tomb.

There came the holy women
With spices and with tears;
The angels tried to comfort them,
But could not calm their fears.

Came Mary to that garden
And sobbed with heart forlorn;
She thought she heard the gardener ask:
“Whom seekest thou this morn?”

She heard her own name spoken,
And then she lost her care:
All in his strength and beauty
The risen Lord stood fair!

Good Joseph had a garden;
Amid its trees so tall
The Lord Christ rose on Easter Day:
He lives to save us all.

And as he rose at Easter
He is alive for aye,
The very same Lord Jesus Christ
Who hears us sing today.

Go tell the Lord Christ's message,
The Easter triumph sing,
Till all his waiting children know
That Jesus is their King.

Alda M. Milner-Barry



Reflection

As you think about the encounter of Mary with Jesus in the garden, remember that the Lord is with you. As you reflect upon this glorious truth, know that you are loved with an everlasting love. You are forgiven and accepted. Begin to offer the Lord your prayers, in your own words or using the prayer written below.

Offer yourself to the Lord. Give him all your regrets and sorrows and trust him to carry them for you. Tell him about your concerns and difficulties and leave them with him. Think of things for which you are grateful and give him your thanks. Share with him your gladness and joys.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I know that you are alive for evermore. You are always with me. There is no situation that I can ever face that is too difficult for you. I know that you have always been with me, but that sometimes I have not appreciated that you were there. Now I hear you call my name. I respond in praise and worship. I give you all that I am, all my heart and soul and mind and strength. Take my concerns and worries and help me to serve you in lightness and freedom of heart. I dedicate myself to you in love from this day forward for all eternity. Amen

