

‘Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb.’

In the name etc.

Darkness. It’ll mean different things to different people. For some it will be a rush back to childhood, to being scared of the dark, for others associated with rest or with work or with socialising. To me the dark will always be associated with the possibility of jokes, of pranks. Darkness is a time, after all, for surprises.

When I was at school I recall those long days when school would start and end in the dark. Nothing delighted us more than placing chairs in the corridors in those afternoons and evenings of darkness and waiting for the immensely satisfying tell tale ‘argh’ as a member of staff banged their shin into it.

Of course, darkness isn’t always the setting for practical jokes. Isn’t always the place where the surprises we find are amusing. It being dark is a metaphor we use for things not being as they should be, for there being a lack of light and implicitly a lack of hope.

This world can sometimes seem dark, I’d go as far to say often is dark, in a much more serious way. A cursory look to the news, a cursory look to the areas of pain in our own lives, a cursory look into our souls confirms that times can be very dark indeed.

But- but- Easter is a reminder that in the midst of the dark is the promise of light. We have heard the story of the first Easter. It is no coincidence that Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb when it is still dark: not just because it is in the dark that we are most likely to be surprised but also because it is when it is dark that we need and look for light.

It is at the tomb that she finds light: a light that is set to change all things, to shine a light that is beyond and above every other. A light that changes everything.

What is this light that she finds? The Resurrected Jesus. The Risen Christ. The one whom she and others had loved and served and had presumed was gone forever, was back. Shining, in the midst of the darkness, as a blaze of light.

A good story, you might say! We know why he was a light to Mary: but why does he matter to us today? Why have we gathered here today to mark the continued triumph of that light? Well, because of his resurrection. Because of his defeat of death. Because he still offers a light in the world which we have admitted is darker than we might like it to be.

Because God himself chooses to die and then to rise again. In doing so he chooses to totally change our relationship with death. Death can no longer have its sting, the grave can no longer have its victory. For God himself dies and rises again in Christ, not because he needs to: but so that we can as well. The Resurrection is God’s gift to us. To

Mary, to John, to those who lie in the churchyard here, to me and to each and everyone of you.

That is what is accomplished at Easter, why we celebrate it: because by Jesus rising to life again, we have been given access to life in the midst of death, hope in the midst of a fallen world, light in the midst of darkness.

And when we know that the light is there, that the darkness will not, cannot triumph, then nothing can be the same again. That is what is celebrated in this church every single week of every single year: the promise of Christ that we and the world and life itself can be and is transformed. That is what is extended to each and everyone of you: not just on Easter day but in the eternal Easter tide, that is to say every day. That there will always be hope, there will always be light, God will always be with us.

One more question remains: why? Why does God do this? Plenty of other religions believe that God remains distant, plenty of people believe it's an impossibility for him to interfere. Many don't believe in him at all. Why do we believe differently? Well, because at the very heart of Christianity is this belief: that God is love.

Love. Love is what he is and what he chooses to extend to us. He feels deep, death defying love- love strong enough to change this world for ever, love strong enough to call each of us from the sleep of sin and death, love strong enough to make us, like him, **rise**.

'Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb.' What does she find there? What can we still find there today? Life, and in that life, love.

In the name etc.