

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Gospel reading we've just heard is so pregnant with meaning it's almost impossible to do it justice in a short sermon. Almost every phrase operates at so many levels. St John the Evangelist gives us not only an account of the first appearance of the Risen Jesus to Mary Magdalen - in this encounter he presents to us a powerful theological reality of what the Resurrection of Jesus achieves.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark.

This setting - on the first day, in the darkness - deliberately reminds us of the story of creation at the beginning of Genesis.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters... and there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

As Mary Magdalen goes to the tomb, she goes because Jesus has come to the end of his earthly life. She finds herself encountering the crucible of new and eternal life. Here there are no waters of chaos, but those waters find themselves reflected in Mary's tears, the cries of a person in all the chaos and turbulence of grief.

Once again, as Mary Magdalen mistakes Jesus for the gardener, we are transported back to the first pages of Scripture. In the story of creation, God tends the garden of eden as a kind of heavenly gardener. In this encounter with new creation, God is mistaken for a gardener in Christ. Mary's supposition that Jesus is a garden isn't as incorrect as it might at first seem.

Even Jesus' questioning of Mary Magdalene echoes those first Genesis creation accounts. No longer does God ask "What is this you have done"? as God asks of Eve, but now 'Woman, why are you weeping?'. The consequences of the Fall have been overturned in Christ's resurrection. What we have done has been transformed in Christ. What Christ has done wipes away every tear.

Finally, just as creation begins with God naming the day and the night, the earth and the sky, so this encounter with new creation begins with God's use of a name: 'Mary'. Jesus speaks to her by name and she realises she was in the presence of the Risen Christ all along.

The long history of misogyny and instance against women in the Church has often ignored the importance of Mary Magdalene's witness. Whilst the history of the Church is full of stories of the role of Eve in the fall of humankind in that first garden, much less focus has been given on the role of Mary Magdalene in the new creation of the Resurrection in this encounter with the one she mistakes for the garden, much less is made of her being the first to be called and sent out by name to share in the good news of the Risen Life.

Mary Magdalen is often referred to as Apostle to the Apostles, but what it means to refer to her as an apostle is downgraded and downplayed.

She's not regarded as an apostle like the other apostles. Her ministry isn't seen as foundational in the way the male apostles ministry stands at the fount of the apostolic succession we trace through our bishops even to the present day. And yet here we see that she is the first to encounter the risen Jesus. She is the first to be sent out as apostle to apostles to announce the good news to the disciples. She is the first to encounter the very site and source of the new creation in which we will all one day share.

Mary's name - Magdalene - could refer to her place of birth, Magdala. It could also be a nickname - 'Tower'. Or perhaps both. Just as Jesus named Simon Peter to signify his place as a 'rock' amongst the early disciples, so Mary's name might have been given to her by Jesus to signify her place as a 'tower' of the faith. Today, we see Simon Peter, the rock in whose honour our church is named and whose prayers we ask in this place, remains away. Today, it's Mary Magdalen the tower who takes the leading role - in rushing to the tomb, in witnessing to the Resurrection, in encountering her Risen Lord, in being called and sent out by name to share this Good News.

Today as we celebrate Mary Magdalen and ask her for her prayers, let us build our faith on this foundation, on this tower of the faith. Mary Magdalen, Apostle to the Apostles, pray for us and for all of us with trembling faith and tears who are seeking the Risen Christ, even as in the midst of all our the chaos and turbulence of our lives Jesus calls us by name, and calls to share in the new creation, the Risen life, even now, even as we meet him here in bread and in wine. Amen.