***Then it clicked!* Sermon for Easter Day 9 April 2023**

**John 20: 1-18 (Rev Phil Wootton)**

I love a good murder mystery, whether in a book or on TV. It’s the puzzle that grabs my attention, so please, no gritty realism – we get too much of that on the news! *Murder in Paradise* and its spin-off *After Paradise* are the dramas pulling in the ratings at present. They’re utterly predictable, of course: absurd scenarios set in stunning scenery. The detective is clueless for 50 minutes of an hour-long drama. Then suddenly it all clicks together – means, motive and opportunity apply for one person alone. An impossible crime has a single solution. The suspects are gathered. Detective demonstrates brilliance. A satisfying arrest is made. It’s all come from that moment when it clicked!

Easter Day in the Gospels is a narrative of confusion and chaos in the half-light of dawn – comings and goings, running and lingering, belief and disbelief, despair and hope. Those who look at the four Gospels forensically sometimes complain at inconsistencies in the evidence – that details are at variance between the Gospels. Others (including many whose line of work involves comparing eye-witness accounts of unexpected dramatic incidents) find the differences make it all the more convincing. Different witnesses remember different details. It’s also these details, carefully chosen as the most salient by each writer, that allow readers to imagine themselves present on that most strange and wonderful morning.

The Gospel according to St John focusses attention on three witnesses – Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and someone described as ‘the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved.’ It’s generally believed this is John, the source of the Gospel that bears that name, but it must be significant that he speaks of himself this way, so let’s do the same.

The day starts ‘while it is still dark.’ Mary Magdalene is wandering in the darkness, outside the city walls, moving around the tombs, weeping. Her love for Jesus was great, her grief overwhelming. The Song of Songs prefigures Mary’s loss: ‘I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. I called him but he gave no answer’ (Song of Songs 3: 1). Her heart is broken. Then as if it cannot get any worse, she finds the stone at the entrance to Jesus’ tomb has been removed. Someone must have stolen his body.

She runs. She runs to the others, to Peter, to this disciple whom apparently Jesus loved … tells them someone’s taken his body, I don’t know where! They run … run to the tomb. Why? – because they don’t quite believe her, perhaps? Surely, she’s got the wrong tomb? Surely, there’s a simple explanation?

The ‘other disciple’ outruns Peter. Perhaps, as tradition suggests, he’s a younger man, more fleet of foot. Perhaps there’s something deeper, about this ‘one whom Jesus loved.’

According to this Gospel, he, unlike the other men, has followed right to the cross; has been spoken to by Jesus from the cross; has heard Jesus commend Mary his mother to him and himself to Mary; and has witnessed Jesus die from close-up. He knows he is loved by Jesus. Is it that love that spurs him to reach the tomb first? But still diffident he waits outside, and from here, he observes the evidence: the stone rolled away, the strips of linen from the shroud lying on the floor. He deduces no grave robber would leave such valuable cloth behind. When he does step inside, he sees the head cloth neatly folded separately. Suddenly, it clicks: he sees and believes. Although he does not yet understand, he knows he is beloved, and love and faith go hand in hand.

For Peter, it was harder. He was outrun. Perhaps he’s heavy with sadness. Perhaps he cannot imagine any good coming from Mary’s news. Perhaps he’s weighed down by guilt: he’d said he would stick by Jesus to the end, and yet he’s denied knowing him three times. His own failure is overwhelming. But he is the leader still. He is Peter the rock, so he will lead the way into the rock tomb. But inside the cave, he only sees its emptiness, matching his own inner emptiness; the darkness matching his own inner darkness. So, he does not yet believe. He will need another moment for it to click. He will need to be back in his old haunts, doing his old job, seeing from his fishing boat a man on the shore – then it will click and he'll throw himself overboard to wade to the living Jesus. It will need a further personal interview to put him truly on the path. He will have to be asked three times about his own love for Jesus, and three times be commissioned for active service, before it will finally click for him, deep within, that the living Lord truly both loves him and believes in him.

Back on Easter morning, the men run back home, leaving Mary Magdalene in her grief. Still blinded by tears, she peers into the tomb. Jesus is still not there, but instead two angels sit where his body had lain. She does not understand what this can mean, and turning she does not recognise Jesus himself standing directly behind her. She can’t see beyond the problem in her head – where his dead body may be. But what she can’t see, she can hear – hear his voice; hear him speaking her name. ‘Mary.’ That’s enough. That does it. Then it clicks for her. Remember the words of Isaiah: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. You are precious to my eyes and honoured. And I love you’ (Isaiah 43: 1, 4). Jesus appears for her not with power but with gentle love, and shares a simple heart-to-heart moment with her, a gentle moment of eternity.

But she is not to cling to him. She must lose her embrace and release him. There’s a job to do: she got to tell the men! That must have been hard – to move from an intimate encounter with Jesus, and go to the larger community with all its needs and expectations. She must make this happening not just about her, but about them all. She must share her news with these men who had let Jesus down, who for the most part had not followed him to the cross (for all their bold assertions) and who had shown painfully little compassion for her grief. But Jesus calls them his ‘brothers’ so who is she to deny it? That movement, too, is a moment when something clicks – this is not just about my moment with Jesus, it’s about Jesus being for all.

Mary Magdalen, Simon Peter, and the ‘other disciple whom Jesus loved’ together represent us all. Like them, at times we run here and there frantically, not quite knowing what we should do, in the darkness of our own understanding, feeling ourselves to be alone, empty, drained – longing, even weeping, for a key to inner peace. But somewhere, in the middle of it all, we discover the One we search for has himself searched us out. We find him each in our own way: perhaps through the gathering the evidence together; or perhaps in the fellowship (like that lakeside barbecue), or perhaps whispering our own name in our ear. But always it involves knowing we are love by him. At that moment, it clicks, and when it clicks what matters is that we respond – ‘Rabboni, Teacher, Lord, you are alive!’ – and go and share the news.