

April 21 (Easter Sunday)

Acts10:34-43

1Cor.15:19-26

Jn.20:1-18

Let us pray: O Resurrected Holy One, you must reign till you put all your enemies under your feet and such your last enemy is death, so as to hand over the kingdom to God the Father. May we, like Mary Magdalene, eventually recognise your victory over death, so that sorrow can be turned into joy, and in joy we can pass on the Easter Good News to all. Amen.

Happy Easter! Today we gather here to worship the Resurrected Christ in celebration of his resurrection to grant us new life. What's more important for us as creatures than being alive and be able to lead abundant life?

With our late winter this year, even on some cold early March days, I saw birds shivering on the bare branches, desperately (hoping against hope as they surveyed the snow-covered ground) to look for miracle of food in whatever form. I hope they had survived, so also to be able to utter those lovely bird-songs I heard lately, sweet songs emerging from branches of flower-trees. What a celebration of life!

Yes, this late winter has been cruel not only to small creatures, but even to us human beings. Even a few weeks ago some of our elderly parishioners still had to fight hard against respiratory diseases, as Vancouver embraced the rare phenomenon of having cold and flu viruses circulating around town in as late as March! And we all carefully guard our wellness against ill-health, not to mention against death.

And it's not just flu and cold. Parents in B.C. became concerned about the spreading of measles among children, something which had not been heard of for decades and yet coming back to haunt us these days. Death can be a real threat anywhere any time. This is not to mention death caused by natural disaster, such the recent Cyclone Idai disaster when the storm attacked Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi in South East Africa, close to a thousand people died and over 500,000 displaced, following which spread of deadly cholera kicked in as the severe flooding damaged water systems leading to a lack of clean water, claiming more lives. Although we all know that death is a certainty in life, we as human beings still need hope in order to embrace death, whether natural or unexpected ones.

And that's why Easter hope is the answer. Like how we hear from St. Paul writing to the Corinthians in today's Second Reading: ' . . . Christ has been raised from the dead . . . so all will be made alive in Christ. . . For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.' Yes, such good news of Easter, just as how we heard its being grasped or experienced by the disciples John and Mary Magdalene, as we heard from our Gospel Reading today.

There, we obviously realized that Jesus' disciples were not psychologically prepared for Jesus' resurrection, despite he had foretold his suffering, death and resurrection shortly before he was betrayed by Judas to be arrested by the soldiers and police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, which led to the Passion of the Lord till his death on the cross and burial on that first Good Friday. So from our Gospel Reading today, we saw how, when Mary Magdalene first found the empty tomb early in the morning on the third day after Jesus' death, it didn't cross her mind that Jesus had risen from death. The only thing she chose to do was to run to Simon Peter and John saying, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' As expected or hoped by her, Peter and John went to the tomb, John outrunning Peter but didn't go in until Peter did. So they saw 'the linen wrappings lying there in the tomb and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head rolled up in a place by itself, not lying with the linen wrappings'. Then both of them went home, with Peter not understanding that Jesus had risen from the dead while John believed that Jesus' resurrection had taken place, probably recalling how Jesus had foretold his death and resurrection on the third day. Well, that probably shouldn't surprise us too much, as somewhat like the contrast in personality between Martha and Mary, Peter is the one who is more action-filled and tends to be more reactive than contemplative, while John is the one who, after all, 'reclined next to Jesus as his loving disciple during the Last Supper (John 13:23), and the one who stood beside Jesus' mother Mary near the cross after Jesus had been nailed onto it on Good Friday, as well as the one whom Jesus entrusted his mother to him as a son and he took her into his own home from then onwards. John believed in Jesus' resurrection despite he, like Peter, did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. It's not a mind and brain function, but a heart and soul function that helped John believe that Jesus had risen from the death.

As for Mary Magdalene, she used her heart a lot. For even after Peter and John had gone home after checking out the empty tomb, she stayed behind and kept weeping outside the tomb. She saw two angles giving her a hint as they sat where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet, and they asked her why she wept. We can appreciate that it's hard for Mary to come out from her own presumption as she was emotionally laden with the reality of the loss of Jesus' body, presuming that someone had moved it away, and she's quite determined to locate the body of her teacher and Lord. She even mistook Jesus as the gardener who might have removed Jesus' body and so asked him where she might be able to re-locate the body so that she would take him away.

Whilst her reaction was totally different from that of John, Mary's heart was probably very similar to that of John's as another beloved disciple of Jesus. It is therefore no surprise for us at all to see her overwhelming joy upon hearing Jesus' calling her by

name: 'Mary!' She turned and, without thinking, just burst out in calling him 'Teacher' (of course in her usual way of addressing him in Hebrew as 'Rabbouni!') and sought to hold onto him, so much so that Jesus had to say 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.'

Whilst recognising Jesus' resurrection being translated in disciple John's case as returning home in peace, in Mary's case, it's translated into clearing of the dark clouds over her head to see the joyous hope. No wonder we continue to hear from the Scriptural reading: '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.

That's right. We can appreciate her joy of hope clearing up all her fear, sadness, uncertainty and hopelessness. It's only about 42 hours ago that Mary witnessed Jesus' death on the cruel cross. Mind you, she is also one of the few faithful and courageous ones who stayed with John and Jesus' mother Mary at the feet of Jesus' cross upon the crucifixion. She is the first one who showed up at the tomb early on Sunday morning to find that the tomb-stone had been removed from the tomb and couldn't find Jesus' body inside the tomb. No matter how courageous she had been, she must still be overwhelmed by fear, sadness and uncertainty. Otherwise she won't immediately ran to tell Peter and John about it, probably in the hope that these major disciples of Jesus could fetch better than her in that extreme state of despair. Yet when the two male disciples returned home upon seeing the empty without uttering a word to her, Mary could only keep on weeping outside the tomb, even bending over to look into the tomb again, only this time seeing two angels who weren't helpful either, as they asked her why she was weeping. It must be frustrating – why won't she find someone who could help her at least to re-locate the body of Jesus? Death is bad enough, her wound from grief simply didn't need to have salts rubbed in by not being able to locate Jesus' body. Even if she remembered Jesus' mentioning about resurrection after death (just like how she remembered her brother Lazarus had been raised from death by Jesus not too long ago) and had placed some hope on seeing Jesus' rising from death (perhaps like how her brother had been called by Jesus to come out from the tomb four days after death, even still with the grave clothes wrapping around his body), for her not seeing the body seemed to be losing the last silver lining of the dark cloud hanging over her head ever since three o'clock on Friday afternoon when Jesus breathed his last on the cross. She definitely needed to know Jesus had risen!

Most of us treasure the taste of relief over matters (big or small) we encounter in life which drag us down emotionally. A small example: three weeks ago I was quite exhausted with both my colleague and my mother having substantial health problems. It's much more than mere emotional stress as I literally had to take up my colleague's

job in addition to mine while suddenly had to become the major care-giver at home of my 95 years old mother suffering from pneumonia. We in church were expecting the availability of palm branches ordered by us so that we could then pick them up in time for Palm Sunday. The Church-Supply company had just moved from a near-by location to a far-away spot in Burnaby close to Coquitlam, and the parishioner who would pick up the supply had to leave Vancouver for Singapore. I'd phoned the Church-supply company the week before but they said the palms would only arrive the following week. So when I received their call to tell us the availability before the parishioner's departure, I was overjoyed and kept saying, 'thank you, thank you!' The person phoning us must be surprised at my extreme gratitude, not knowing I was also thanking God for lifting this small piece of dark cloud above my head.

With that, I could (like Mary), focus on 'witnessing to Christ's resurrection' (as I worked on Holy Week liturgy). Like Peter in our First Reading today, I yearn to, (also cognizant of its significance), share the good news of "Christ's preaching peace as 'Lord of all', through God's raising him from death despite his being put to death on the cross, so that 'everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name'". This good news of Easter, like how St. Paul said in our Second Reading today, '(that) Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead . . . (thereby) has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power (i.e. sin) . . . (and) death . . . (and) hands over the kingdom to God the Father' is not only cause for peace for John and cause for joy for Mary Magdalene, but also cause for new life in abundance for all who care to pose faith upon Christ, our 'rabbouni' who teaches and lives out love and forgiveness, through self-sacrificial love for all on the cross. And so we can all send forth our heart-felt greetings of 'Happy Easter!'

Let us pray again:           O Resurrected Holy One, you must reign till you put all your enemies under your feet and such your last enemy is death, so as to hand over the kingdom to God the Father. May we, like Mary Magdalene, eventually recognise your victory over death, so that sorrow can be turned into joy, and in joy we can pass on the Easter Good News to all. Amen.