

Morningside Sermon 10.30am 5/4/26

Easter Everlasting Love

Jeremiah 31:1-6; John 20:1-18

How much love is there in your life today? It might have seemed odd on the Easter Day, the holiest day of the Christian year, to include a reading from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. What has a 2,700-year-old curmudgeon got to tell us about the story of Easter? Writing to his people about God at a time in the 7th BC, he faced with them over 40 years the collapse of the building central to his faith, invasion by merciless enemies, the murder of his nation's leaders and the forced exile of many of his contemporaries to a foreign land.

Nevertheless it was at that time of terror, riven with deep uncertainties, shot through with economic, social and political upheavals, that Jeremiah wrote. Given what 2026 has been to date - maybe his bleak world-view is not so very different from the realities we face today. It is hard to believe in an Easter world of light and hope when the horizons around us are clouded and dark with pain and fear and uncertainty.

And yet...into that long-ago world Jeremiah wrote to his people. They had survived so much, clung on, refused to give in, and in that wilderness of pain, found grace and courage to continue and not give up, because somewhere, in the midst of all that struggle, and it was such a struggle, the belief, the feeling, the hope that God had struggled with them and for them and, *"...loved you with an everlasting love..."*

An everlasting love.

They tried to end the everlasting love by falsely accusing it and condemning it to death.

They tried to end the everlasting love on the cross of Calvary.

They tried to end the everlasting love by putting it into a stone tomb and rolling a great stone across the entrance.

But here is the thing: everlasting love cannot be ended. No matter the crushing or the beating or the nailing or the killing it refuses to die and refuses to end. And that love, this Easter morning, is what Jesus Christ comes once more to offer to you, and to me, and to anyone who wishes to accept it. God's promise of everlasting love in Jesus is a promise kept.

Not because of crucifixion death but because of resurrection life. God keeps the promise that He is going to be with us, always, to the end of time. Easter day then, and Easter day now, is the moment of God's truth. Whatever the darkness; whatever our strengths or weaknesses; whatever our commitment or ambivalence towards what it means to be a Christian and part of God's Church today, God loves us with an everlasting love.

Before they became the Bible, the stories of Scripture were lived. They smelled of and sounded like the real world. The dust of ancient walking paths settled, and the sweat of an early morning run evaporated. Before we sanctified them, the people who populate the resurrection garden were real people, with hopes and dreams, fears and nightmares, feelings and thoughts. Just like us. It is hard if we have heard this story so many times, but its powerfulness remains if we pay attention. The story of that first Easter morning still has something to say. It calls us to do more than just believe certain things. It calls us to become a particular kind of people.

What was going through the mind of Mary Magdalene on that first Easter morning? The mysterious angels asked her, *'Woman, why are you weeping?'* She might have said: "I keep thinking of the way they killed Him. The nails, the blood, the jeering laughter, the noise, the sneering, the baying for blood, the throwing dice, the cheering, the way the disciples all ran away, the way Pilate washed his hands, the finger-pointing, the lashing, the spear piercing His side.

Human beings can be so cruel, so mean, so violent, so stupid, so weak, so selfish, so treacherous.

It's not just the death that makes me cry; it's the wickedness and sinfulness."

For Mary, along with disbelief, and pain, and loneliness in her bereavement, she stared through her tears into the nothingness of that empty tomb. Like many people since then, tears come when we try so hard to say the right thing, say the right thing, think the right thing, do the right thing, and yet despite it all - what can feel like nothingness, and emptiness, and the sense of our world crumbling. We look at so much in our world today and there are tears. Of grief; of anger; of disbelief; of fear; of frustration; of doubt.

Mary turned away from the tomb, and found herself beginning another conversation with a man she took to be the gardener. He also asked her, *"Woman, why are you weeping?"* Her response tumbled out of her once again.

Mary Magdalene in the cold dark-before-dawn. John's Gospel paints the picture of this seeking woman, who is surprised by what she finds, or rather, by the One Who finds her. All the gardener, Who is Jesus, says to her is one word: "Mary!" Hearing her name spoken by Jesus' familiar voice brings a transformation of Mary's grief and the opening of a new world for her; and for us.

She'd been crying. Then she suddenly felt the sense of a companion she thought she would never see again, a touch from someone who would never let her go, the saying of her name that she thought she would never hear again. "Mary." Her eyes washed by her tears are opened. She's looking into the face of the resurrected Jesus, and His everlasting love.

Easter is drenched with tears. Not only the tears of loss and death. When Easter comes, when Jesus comes again, the tears become tears of joy.

Christians use the phrase, 'the word of God' often to mean the Bible. But there, on that first Easter morning, in a garden outside an empty tomb, one single word to a devastated woman changed

everything. One single word turned death to life, despair to hope, darkness to light. 'Mary.' Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calls His sheep by name. 'Mary.' I don't know that she understood all that was happening in that moment. There is no worked-out theology of resurrection here. There is, I think, more of an experience of incarnation, of the presence of Jesus *with* her, and with all of us today on this Easter morning in 2026. Here is the evidence, and experience, and reality of everlasting love.

The exiled Israelites in Babylon; the weeping disciple Mary in a cold garden outside a tomb. What brings them together is that old prophet Jeremiah and his vision of God's everlasting love. "We sing our hallelujahs in a world that is hardly inclined to sing and finds very little to sing about. We sing because we know that there is another way to run a world, a world where death is not the final word, where despair is not the winner, where human power and hierarchies are not thought to be inevitable and unchangeable. Like Jeremiah and Mary we need to look squarely in the face of the world's ugliness and horror and hopelessness and shout, "Christ is risen!" because the God Who raised Jesus from the dead loves us with an everlasting love and will always, always, continue divine faithfulness to us."ⁱ

If you want to know what heaven on earth feels like, this is it on Easter Day. Sorrow turning to dancing; words turning to song; death turning to life. This is the touch of life and hope in the face of trauma; this is the tenderness of God's everlasting love overcoming isolation. Easter is not the dramatic conclusion of the story of faith. Rather, Easter is just the beginning.

Do we still have questions? Yes! Might we still have doubts? Yes! Should we see Easter as an open door and not a closed book finishing with, 'The End'? Of course! The story of Easter contains all of that, for if it did not it might not be large enough to reveal God to us. I say without apology or hesitation: what we proclaim at Easter is too mighty to be encompassed by certainty, too

wonderful to be found only within the borders of our imagination. Faith has room for question marks as well as exclamation marks.

The world is dark. The world is dangerous. The world is fearful. But the people of faith keep trying, and keep adapting, and keep persevering, and keep doing the best they can. Even in what feels like a hopeless exile. Even with tears in their eyes. Until this day. This Easter Day. When all the wilderness of the world is shrunk to a small garden with an empty tomb, and we wonder, 'What are we looking for? Who are we looking for?' we look up and we see Jesus. And He'll reply, perhaps with tears in *His* eyes, 'I've been looking for *you*.'

Everlasting love keeps on looking for us. Easter Day. Every day.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

ⁱ John C Holbert, *Feasting on the Word Year A, Vol 2, p357*