

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you our Lord and redeemer, Amen.

It was early morning on Easter Day. Mary Magdalene was gazing at the horizons of darkness, the tomb was there signifying that everything has ended for her. The messiah narrative now no longer could be held on to. The gruesome killing of Jesus should have been too much for her. But is that the end of the story? Or is it the beginning of a new story?

On this Easter morning I would like to focus on a few verses from the Gospel lesson we read today. John chapter 20 verses 1 to 18. More specifically verses 11-18. I would like to draw your attention to 3 insights from this text asking a question. What is the role of the church in a context like the one we are living in today?

The Messenger of the Lord was present.

One of the questions that we hear reverberating across the world today is, where is the church in all of this? People are suffering, people are in pain, in agony, people are on the road, people are turning refugees, there are people being bogged down by the pressures of life... Where is the church? This text helps us understand the primary responsibility of the church that is, to be present when people cry.

Mary Magdalene had great expectations when she followed Jesus. It was Jesus who gave her a new beginning, healing her from the Demon possession. Jesus invited her to be part of the inner core of the ministerial team. Mary had a significant role to play in the life and work of Jesus. But the death of Jesus, the gruesome killing was too much for her to bear, she was in tears, she was grieving the death of a dear one, death of a master, death of a guru. Being beside a grieving person is one of the best ways of being present as the messenger of God.

Being present when people weep, bent over into the darkness, into emptiness, is the call to being the church today. If it was the Magdalen then, there are several people like her around us today living in a sense of emptiness having lost everything they've had. As Mary peeps into the tomb expecting a corpse, there are several people gazing at the tombs of their dear ones today. Looking into darkness. The messenger of the Lord was present in the midst of the darkness, that is what you and I are called to be, to be present.

Secondly the message of consolation

The gospel message that the world needs today is this message of comfort and consolation "Why are you weeping", there are several women weeping today in a context of state violence like the war we see, in a context of domestic violence, in the context of trauma and depression, in a context of exclusion.

I attended class with an Ukrainian girl, she and I came to Freiburg around the same time. She was the happiest and most optimistic person I've met but one day everything changed as the news of the first bombing in Ukraine reached us. She still seemed to be put together as the women in her family fled leaving the men behind fighting for their home. She remained a rock for them here but when she saw the tears in her father's eyes, the agony in her friend's voices, the terror on the children's faces she felt helpless, as the days went by all she had time to do was to read up on the news and make sure everyone is alright. As the terror of this reality is still very much prominent we ought to remember that there are young people crying, with broken hearts, crying because families are shattered, crying because of War, crying because they are uprooted from their roots, crying because they live as refugees, crying because of several hardships to each their own. Friends my question on Easter day is this... have we stop by and asked "My friend why are you crying?"

Facilitating Jesus encounters.

Being a messenger of God today is facilitating Jesus encounters or the encounters with the risen lord. The synoptic gospel adds to the sense of resurrection in this conversation "He is not here. He has risen from the dead as he said he would. Come and see the place where his body was." (Mathew 28:6) Mary looks around and encounters Jesus. Though she did not recognise him first and lamented to him thinking it was the Gardner about how she thought they had taken the body away... the very call "Mary" helped to recognise the risen Lord, she shouted "Rabboni" and we know the rest of the Easter story.

Mary running out and declaring the essence of the gospel saying I have met the risen Lord and this is what he told me. “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

The messengers who asked the question and told her that Jesus is risen in fact was facilitating a Jesus encounter. In the dark chamber of the tomb they sat as a shining light and told Mary “He is not here. He is risen.” Seeking him among the dead is not what you should be doing. Mark adds to this conversation in chapter 16 assuring Mary that she will see the risen Lord. Perhaps that conversation put the seed of a glimmering hope in Mary preparing her for the ensuing Jesus encounter. If he is not here, if his body is not here, where is he then? Mary would not have thought that the body breathed again but she was equipped pointing towards the possibility of a new beginning. He is risen. The message the world needs today is this. The risen lord is here. Here with us.

He is here with us as the wounded healer, he is here with us as the weeping saviour, he is here with us as the wonderful counsellor. May I conclude asking those three questions yet again. Are we as a church present? Are we as a church comforting? Are we as a church proclaiming?

When the pandemic locked us down, we sang a song of hope proclaiming the presence of the risen Lord with us and today as we worship with most of those restrictions lifted, that song made great sense to me and I'll sing it as I close.

Song

Friends on this Easter Day the message for us as disciples and as a church is simple, Be present as the light as this broken world searches in darkness, to be comforters as people cry, to be pointers to the risen Lord, experiencing him and sharing him with others.

G. D
G. C. D
G. Em C. D
G. Em. G
G. D

G
G. Em. C. D
G. C. Em. D. G

Where is God
Where is God in all of this?
A little virus could lock us down
Leaving us starin' at the walls
O where is God?

O He is
The God of Moses and Miriam
Who cried out "Let my people GO!"

The wounded healer is here with us
Right within these locked down doors
Showin g us his scars, of the cross
Telling us
Get on, Get on, Get on with Life (x2)

The weeping saviour is here with us
Right near the sepulchres around
Showing us his grace, abounding love
Telling us
Come out, Come out, Come out of the tomb (x2)

The wondrous counsellor is here with us
Right amidst our broken world
Showing us his healing touch, care and mercy
Telling us
Press on, Press on, Press on with hope(x2)

O He is
The God of Moses and Miriam
Who cried out "Let my people GO!" (x2)

So Here is God
Here is God in all of this?
No virus can ever lock us down
Leaving us locked in for long
O He is God!
HeRE is God!