

It is hard being in a life-changing situation when you don't know who to believe or what to do. Many people are experiencing such a time at the moment. So much incorrect news, fake news, distorted news, conflicting advice. Where is clarity and certainty? Where is stability? We all need a some firm, stable things in life, especially when the world is in a place of massive upheaval and change. A centre, a core, a place and point of stability is crucial to being able to make decisions and act with confidence. Something every dancer, ever martial artist knows, is that without a solid knowledge, experience and strength of your core, your point of balance, you cannot do anything significant. As we reflect, in life of the resurrection, on the state of the disciples we might feel something of their confusion.

At the point John's text brings us to today, we find the disciples meeting, likely praying, locked together in the Upper Room where they had recently shared their last supper with Jesus. But this time the atmosphere is very different. It is suffused with fear, confusion and uncertainty. All of the stability and confidence they had in Jesus, had based their lives on, had given everything up for was now scrambled. They had seen or at least heard Jesus die, brutally. They had seen Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea take Jesus' cold, brutalised body down from the cross and seal it in the tomb. Roman guards protected the site, guarding the tomb so no one could move the stone and enter. Everything they had hoped for ...gone. All they could do was pray and wait.

But was it? And hence the real confusion and uncertainty. If Jesus was dead, then getting out of town before the religious leaders and the Romans captured them too was the best option. Hiding among the thousands gathered in Jerusalem until they could sneak out was the best option. Except, as John's gospel tells it, the woman Mary Magdalene had come to them early that morning with startling news, almost unbelievable news. She had gone to the tomb before dawn and the tomb was open. The massive stone that had been rolled in front of the crypt had been removed and where were the soldiers, the guards? She ran back to tell the disciples and Peter and John had run to investigate but had seen nothing. At least they believed her story. But what did it mean? Peter and John returned to where they were staying, concerned and confused.

Mary stayed at the tomb, bereft. As she wept, she looked deep into the tomb only to see two angels in white seated where Jesus body had been, one at the head the other at the foot. At this point we get a somewhat ironic conversation. The angels ask her, "Woman, why are you crying?" This is worth pondering for a moment. Why ask such a question? It would seem pretty obvious wouldn't it?

There is a backstory to our life and world that is clearly there throughout the Scriptures, commonly ignored in our highly scientific world, but one that is worth pondering from time to time. The presence of angels is a nice given at Christmas when they sing so nicely, or not so nice in the Hollywood image of dread as they fly over Egypt delivering the plagues or are characterised as fallen demons wrecking havoc on the earth. But otherwise we give them little credence. In the Scriptures, in the New Testament in particular, the angels (the ἄγγελος in Greek) are generally human or celestial messengers. In John's later work of Revelation the angels are particularly active in carrying out God's end-time purposes upon the earth. Sometimes they are guardians of people or churches but by far, most of the time, they are messengers.

Unlike God but like us, the angels are fallible and need to learn. Like us the angels were created and can discern good and evil (2 Samuel 14:17). However, they have been around far longer than human beings, being present at the creation of the world. Job 4:18 tells us that God charges His angels with error, holding them to account for their actions. In the Book of Job the angels, who are not subject, by the way, to human passions, learn that in the depths of challenge, people turn to what is core in life. Vital to that is their relationship with their Creator. That inner spiritual pricking and prodding, that is always there, is more frequently addressed in times of serious difficulty. In Job's wrestling with God, Job comes to a place of recognition, out of his own situation in life, of the true majesty, power and timelessness of God. He comes to an acceptance, if not understanding, that God is God and that God's economy, God's plans, will play out in God's own time. Furthermore, Job learns that even in the midst of the greatest difficulty, God is very much aware of what he is going through and that God is not removed from the situation but loves him and will restore him at the right time. Job learns that he can be completely honest and transparent with God, that God can more than handle it, and that God knows where his heart is at, even in Job's most down periods. The angels learn through this and through Job's strength and faith.

Now at the tomb we have two angels who ask Mary, "Woman, why are you crying?" Being emotionless, passionless the angels cannot understand. Luke tells us Mary supported Jesus financially in His ministry (Luke 8:1-3), she had been at the foot of the cross (John 19:25) and watched Jesus placed in the tomb (Matt 15:47) but most of all Jesus had saved her from demonic possession (Luke 8:2) and given her a new life. But she had watched Him die. The angels cannot understand that people had not taken what Jesus had so plainly said at face value. Jesus said He was going to rise on the third day so what had Mary missed? This sociopathological response of the angels is typical. They simply cannot comprehend human emotion and how it can over-ride reason. We know that. As any person who has ever fallen in love knows this, or think about your own experience, emotion can sometimes completely over-ride even the best logic at times for almost everyone. How can a man or woman be so engrossed in their work that they have no time at all then, with a new love or passion, suddenly be able to find all the time in the world? We can so easily be dictated to by emotion. Mary had seen Jesus die and now, indignity upon indignity, His body has been stolen. In the face of harsh human realities and emotional travail our brains seek out the simplest, basic conclusions. Body gone. Body stolen. Me distraught. Me in pain.

At this point Jesus turns up in person. No doubt the angels have now gone away puzzled and wondering. How can humanity be so thick? But Jesus responds to Mary with both compassion and in a way that advances her thinking. He needs to address both aspects of human nature. In the depth of her tears, her pain and preconceived logic Mary cannot even see who is standing right in front of her. Her mind, mired in the pain of loss and practical logic, struggles to believe the incomprehensible. Here is Jesus alive and talking to her. "Just tell me where the body is so I can go get him", she pleads.

Then Jesus says just one word, "Mary". Her name. One can only imagine the depth, the compassion, the love, the depth that went into that one word that cut through everything deep into Mary's mind and subconscious. Instantly she knew who she was talking to and her world upended. Everything she thought she knew and understood would have to be revisited. Turning to him she cried out "Rabboni" in Aramaic. This Jewish Aramaic was the Jewish vernacular of the Syrian derived language that originated in Iranian Azerbaijan. It was the common language of many at the time and

like so many in times of stress, who revert to the language of their childhood, Mary calls out to Jesus in her primal language, she calls out to her ultimate Teacher.

Mary, of course, immediately takes the news of this joyous encounter to the disciples. What are they to make of it all? What were they going to do? Leave immediately and get on with life as it seems Thomas, ever the pragmatist, had decided to do? According to Luke (24:11) the words of the women seemed like nonsense. Now there was fear, confusion and likely a superstitious dread. The combination is paralysing. What was going on? Then, completely unexpectedly John tells us, in the middle of the locked room, suddenly, there was Jesus in their midst.

How would you have responded? How would you respond if that happened right now? John tells us that Jesus begins with the words so often spoken in one form or another when the divine or celestial engages humanity: "Peace be with you." Peace, divine peace, a blessing of calm and quietness into souls into turmoil. Then, as Jesus will do again later with Peter, He doesn't muck around dealing with their emotional issues but rather commissions the gathered group, blesses them with His Spirit and tells them their mission will forgive with forgiveness.

What are we to make of this? Firstly, I'd like to believe that in this encounter Jesus blessed and commissioned both the men and the women present the same way. Clearly men and women were present and Jesus' group of disciples encompassed both. His word in the world is the task of men and women, was then, is today. Secondly, Jesus' peace transcended all of the concerns with which the disciples were wrestling. Thirdly, not only was Jesus resurrection attested to but something in the human comprehension of life itself had dramatically changed. A week later Jesus would re-appear a second time, again in the midst of a locked room. If there was any suggestion that the first "appearance" was a mass hysteria or some other purely psychological event of a traumatised group of disciples, the second appearance made certain it wasn't. In the midst the second time was our pragmatist Thomas. Back with the group, though highly sceptical, was Thomas. He wasn't going to get taken in with the emotive rubbish. How the angels must have enjoyed Thomas! This resurrected Jesus who can appear through locked doors and windows and give new missions was not going to be any figment of Thomas' imagination. Unless he could see for himself, unless he could put his hand in the wound in Jesus' side ripped open by Roman spear and his fingers in Jesus' hands, forever pierced and scarred by iron nails, there was no way he was going to believe anything they said, however much he might hope.

When Jesus appeared to Thomas and Jesus' peace was given, Jesus invited Thomas to do just as he had required. But there was no need. There was no doubt in Thomas' mind. This was no apparition, no psychosis, no product of mass hysteria. This was Jesus, the One he knew, had followed, had died, in the flesh. Thomas' response was full and automatic, **"my Lord and my God"**. And Jesus observed, **"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

God is more than capable of dealing with our doubts, fears and demands for authentication. How God does this for each one of us may not be how we expect or when we expect. When it happened for Thomas, his life was changed from that moment. Thereafter his purpose in life was to share the good news that Jesus was alive and well and working out God's plan for the world and what that meant for us. Thomas would die a martyr to the cause in India and today he is still revered there. Even more that, we too can be a part of what Jesus continues to do in the world as we place our faith and our

lives in Jesus' hands. Jesus would continue to appear before hundreds of people so that His resurrection was undeniable, before He ascended to continue His work as an Intecessor for the world until the time of His return.

The greatest evidence of Jesus resurrection isn't around the physical stuff. If His body had still be there the Romans would have dragged it around the streets of Jerusalem as a warning but it wasn't. But, pun excused, this is immaterial. The greatest evidence of the resurrection is in the changed lives of the disciples from this moment. From fear, confusion, doubt, mistrust and a chaotic life state the disciples are re-energised as a force the world will soon have to reckon with. An encounter with the Living and Resurrected Jesus is life changing, that's all there is to it. Blessed indeed are those **who have not seen and yet have believed.**

In times of challenge we look to Jesus. He is our peace, our calm, our certainty, our Rock in times of great difficulty and stress. Jesus is the One who offers to take our hands to calm our fears and doubts. Our emotion, our passion, our intellect and our reasoning are all brought into proper alignment when Jesus is at the centre of our lives and God gives all of life its true meaning. Then we can know and live the love the Lord gives us as fully integrated beings and step forward with confidence. Now that is something the angels could only dream of and admire. Our Redeemer lives and continues to be here for us, welcoming and loving us, imparting His peace to us today. I pray He shows Himself to you more and more each day.

Let us pray ...

Amen