

A Sermon preached by the Dean of Windsor, the Rt Reverend Dr Christopher Cocksworth, on Easter Sunday, 31st March 2024

***The Readings:
Acts 10.34-43; John 1.1-18***

Questions

A few years ago, a Rabbi was on Radio 4's Thought for the Day. He said, 'someone from my Synagogue asked me recently, "Why do you Rabbis always ask questions?", and I said, 'Why do you ask?'

Asking questions, good questions, is the ancient rabbinical method. Jesus the Teacher, was full of them, as we see in our reading. Maybe the Rabbis learnt it from God who said to Adam and Eve in the Garden when they were hiding in their shame after their sin, 'Where are you?'

Jesus' questions

The first words of Jesus after his resurrection are a question, 'Woman' he says to Mary Magdalene, stricken by grief, searching for the body of the one she loved, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'. And weeping she was, sobbing, inconsolably. Even the angels could not comfort her. It was as if she was weeping with all the women of the world who have had their loved ones torn from them.

Then followed another question, inextricably bound with the first, 'For whom are you looking?'

The very first words Jesus spoke in the Gospel of John were similar but a little different. 'What are you looking for?', said Jesus to two disciples of John the Baptist who were hanging around him, trying to work out who he was.

The *What* question at the beginning of Jesus' ministry had become now, on the other side of his death and resurrection, the *Who* question. 'What are you looking for?' – peace, joy, hope, healing, strength, meaning, purpose, an example to follow, light, life, love, being loved – was now 'Who are you looking for?'

For the one asking the question knew that this woman had found all her wants and desires and hopes for life fulfilled – and then dashed – in the one whose body had been laid in the tomb but now could not be found, such was her grief.

When God saw humanity falling away from him, hiding from him in the garden in the early days of creation, he cried out 'Where are you?'. Now Mary, in another garden, cries out to the angels, to Jesus, to God, 'Where have they taken the body of my Lord?'. Where is he to be found? Where is my hope and my help?'

Jesus' invitation

When Jesus asked the people hovering around him, 'What are you looking for?', they said, 'Rabbi – Teacher – we don't know where you are staying, where you live, where you dwell'. To which Jesus said, 'Come and see!'. They discovered

that he both lived – dwelt – among them, sharing their ordinary lives, and also lived – dwelt – with God. And they became his disciples.

Jesus doesn't need to say to Mary, 'Come and see'. He is there for her. Standing by her. All he does is to call her name, 'Mary'. As she hears his familiar voice say her name, her body, soul and spirit awaken with joy. She sees that Jesus is there for her, just as he has always been, full of life and light and love, bringing her back to life with the energy of his risen life, giving her purpose and meaning for living, answering all her questions, meeting all her longings, giving her hope for the world.

But don't try to hold on to me Mary in this one place and time, he says. I must ascend 'to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God', so that I can be with all people at all times and places, and so that they can be with me, with God.

The Garden and the Gardener

And it all happens in a garden.

We began in a garden, in a garden where things went wrong and life was lost.

Here, in this garden, things are put right.
Death is overcome, life is restored.

Where people once ran from God and hid their face, now people run in search of Jesus and find themselves raised into the presence of God.

Where humanity wept at the sufferings of the world, now Mary testifies to the world, 'I have seen the Lord', and that if the Lord is risen from the tomb then we can have hope that God's ways will triumph.

Mary's question – 'Where is the body of Jesus?' – is answered. He is risen from the dead, and he is here for you.

Jesus' question – 'What, who are you looking for?' – is answered. I am looking for life, to live life well, to live in presence of God according to the purposes of God. I am looking for you.

And God's question – 'Where are you?' – is answered when we hear Christ call us by name, accept his invitation to live with him in the presence of God and join his work of restoring the garden of the world to God's design of love and goodness, peace and kindness, beauty and truth.

And then, the weeping of the world will be transformed into Mary's Easter joy.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!