

## **St Mary Magdalene**

It has been two weeks now since the 12 members of the young soccer team and their coach were rescued from the caves in which they were trapped. We have shared their joy and celebrated the wonderful cooperation of so many people who worked together to find them and bring them out. The story of their rescue will be told again and again. The thing that would have frightened me most if I was one of them would have been that I was there in the dark. In many ways their rescue was from darkness into light, from death into life.

The gospel we just heard is the story of the rescue of Mary Magdalene from darkness into light, from unbelief into faith in her risen Lord. "It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb." Whenever we read John's Gospel we need to look for the symbolism behind the words he chooses to use. The physical darkness symbolised the darkness of unbelief. Mary was going to the tomb only to see the dead body of Jesus. When she saw the stone moved from the tomb she was unable to think that God had anything to do with it. She ran away from the tomb to tell Peter and the other disciple "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him." Her "we" includes Peter and the other disciple in her unbelieving.

We don't hear today what happened when those two disciples run to the tomb and how when they see the empty tomb they come to believe. We pick up the story when Mary is again at the tomb weeping. When she has the courage to go into the tomb the two angels there ask her why she is weeping. In our story now, she is the only one who does not know where they have taken the dead body of Jesus. When she turns around Jesus himself is there, but she does not recognise him. He asks the same question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" But she can only think of him as being the gardener, and one who may have helped take away the dead body of Jesus.

But then there is that moment of recognition. What Jesus had promised when he talked about himself as the Good Shepherd is fulfilled. "The Good shepherd calls each of his sheep by name. I know my own and my own know me." Mary recognises Jesus when he calls her by name. And she responds "Rabbuni", My Master.

Today we are invited to remember with thanks those moments in our lives when we heard Jesus call us by name. Maybe it was in a time of darkness and unbelief that the Lord broke through to us and allowed us to see the light again. Maybe it was in a time when we were overcome by the goodness and kindness of someone who spoke to us in God's name. Perhaps it was in a time of

deep prayer when we were able to hear Jesus call us by name. Whenever Jesus speaks to us it is a word of love.

In our gospel story Mary still has a little way to go before she believes fully. Mary still wants to hold on to the Jesus she knew. But Jesus has to tell her, “Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.” His own journey is incomplete. His coming to glory is still happening. “But go and find the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” The disciples of Jesus are no longer just followers of Jesus, they are his brothers and sisters. With Jesus they can call God their Father. Mary needs to find us too and assure us that we are brothers and sisters of Jesus, sons and daughters of God.

“So Mary of Magdala went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.” By the end of the gospel, as she shares what she had seen and heard, Mary had made her way from unbelief to unconditional faith in Jesus. She had been brought from darkness into the splendid light of Resurrection Faith. This is a journey that you and I need to make many times during our lives. We need to be like the bride we meet in our first reading from the Song of Songs. We need to be people who are always seeking the one whom our heart loves.

God by God’s very nature is usually hidden from us. If God was easily seen, we would not need faith. But even with a deep faith we still search for God. It is our love for God that moves us to search for God. Our faith then helps us to find where he may be hiding. Searching for God is not something that we can do by ourselves. Like the bride who comes upon the watchmen we ask others, “Have you seen him whom my heart loves?” We ask others what their experience of God has been so that we may be able to interpret what is happening in our lives and discover what God may be doing there. Then we can see more clearly where God may be leading us.

This week I learnt a little more about the Plenary Council for the whole Australian Church that is going to be held in 2020 and 2021. It seems a long way off, but the work has already begun to invite everybody in the Church to have a say about the kind of a Church that they want us to be. Already we are being invited to gather with a few others and to prayerfully ask the question, “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?” What we say and what we hear others say will help shape our Church for the future. Our Church needs to be there for everyone who is seeking to find where God is. Our Church needs to listen well to people and walk with them wherever they are on their journey from darkness into light, from unbelief to faith in the God who loves them.