

## Easter Reflections

**...among the children... among the poor... among outsiders...  
among the people who share...among the sad...**

**Bible text: Matthew 28: 1-10**

In the Gospel reading from Matthew's Gospel we've just heard how two very good friends of Jesus went to where he was buried, because they were sad. They were both called Mary: Mary Magdalene and "the other" Mary – surely not Jesus' mother but another friend with the same name.

But instead of finding the quiet burial place of a very much loved friend the women were exposed to a frightening earthquake and the fearful fact that no dead body could be found in that grave.

Jesus wasn't there in his grave. Instead an angel who seems to know all that the two Marys don't know: "I know that you are looking for Jesus; no, he is not there. He has risen... Come and see, the place where he had been laid is empty... But do go and tell the others that he is not dead but going ahead of them to Galilee..."

How must these two women have felt?

I leave it up to you to imagine this...

But: what does it mean to go back to Galilee?

What was Galilee? What does it stand for?

Galilee was the place Jesus came from. And most of his best friends came from there, too. Galilee was home, the ordinary place, every day life, nothing very spectacular. Galilee was a tiny spot on the map of the world, poor and insignificant...

So, in a way, the messenger was saying: Jesus has gone home ahead of you. Go and look for him in your ordinary life and among those who are alive...

And in a way Jesus had shown them where to find him among the ordinary people by the way he had lived and loved and accepted others. So if we want to know where Jesus can be found after his death and resurrection, we must look at the people he had loved and saved. At the people whose lives had been changed through him, and for whom he had made a huge difference.

*Among the children...*

If we remember Jesus' life, we may remember the way he had been with children...

And I would like to invite you to listen to the Canaanite woman's daughter's story:

**Something happened to me when I was little.**

**My mother told me that a man called Jesus had healed me.**

**No one knew what was wrong with me.**

**My mother had been desperate –**

**and when my mom is desperate she doesn't take No for an answer.**

**She'd heard that a healer called Jesus was in the district,**

**and she'd gone to him –**

**given his disciples a hard time until she got to see him face to face;**

**and when she saw him, they argued –**

**lots of eye contact and passion.**

**They both gave their best.**

**First mom seemed to have the last word,**

then Jesus...  
He got the last word:  
He healed me.  
My mom told me last week that she'd heard he'd been killed.  
She was sad. She cried...  
But this morning she was laughing:  
There was a rumour going round  
that he'd had the last word again  
the last word to beat all last words –  
he'd come back from the dead,  
and he'd been seen going home to Galilee.

I reckon anyone who can win an argument with my mom  
must be someone quite amazing...  
Maybe one day I will get to meet him...

What I think is that then and now we can find Jesus with the children, having fun with them, listening to them, caring about them, healing them.  
And I also think that we can find Jesus especially with children who have hard lives, like children who live in places where there is war or violence, or children who get bullied at school, or children who have no grown-ups to look after them, and are hungry and cold.

*Among the poor...*

If we look at Jesus' life we can also find him among the people who are poor; no doubt about that. We find him especially with the ones who have no one to help them, or who can't get jobs and don't have enough money to live on. And in a lot of countries that means they have to become beggars, like this man:

**Blind Bartimaeus' story:**

I followed Jesus.  
I wanted to.  
There was no point me sitting at the side of the road to Jericho any more.  
I could see.  
Jesus had healed me.  
I could see where I was going.  
I could choose for myself what I wanted to do.

I followed him for a week.  
I saw him ride into Jerusalem –  
his long legs dangling over the back of that wee donkey.  
I enjoyed feeling safe and confident in a crowd.  
I listened to him when he told stories.  
I saw how his enemies were never far away.  
I was there when he carried his cross through the streets  
on the way to the crucifixion.  
I almost wished then I couldn't see what was happening –  
so much sadness in his eyes, so much pain.  
I saw the tomb where they put his body – my eyes filled up with tears.

Eventually I went home to Jericho.  
Everything had changed for me.  
People weren't sure how to talk to me.  
I didn't need to beg any longer –  
but I didn't have any other trade.  
I didn't need anyone to guide me around.  
I could look after myself.  
It was scary and exciting at the same time.

And it's still like that:  
Every day I see something new,  
every day I am learning how to be independent –  
how to cook, how to fish –  
and I am learning how to read;  
and there's this woman I often see in the marketplace;  
she smiles at me, and I smile back.  
It feels good.

I think, sisters and brothers, that we can still find Jesus walking along with people who are poor. ...chatting away to them, helping them to be brave enough to go on, and getting angry when countries and governments and businesses act as if their profits are more important than people.

*Among outsiders...*

When we carry on recalling Jesus' life, we cannot help but seeing the outsiders, those who were and those who are discriminated against. They live in the Galilee he leads us to...

With Jesus we find people who are treated unfairly, who don't get an equal say, who feel that they don't count and do not belong. In his lifetime Jesus met a lot of people like that; sometimes they were foreigners or outsiders; maybe they had a different religion or spoke differently. Sometimes other people disapproved of them and looked down on them. As they did to this woman...

**The Samaritan woman's story:**

I was nervous enough when I saw him at the well.  
I always went at noon, when the heat is fiercest,  
because I knew that no one else went then.  
It was best to go alone.  
My people didn't like me. Talked about me,  
pushed me to the side and shouted insults at me.  
They bumped into me on purpose so I spilled my water.  
Everybody looked down on me because I had lived with several men...  
So on that afternoon, there was no one from my people,  
and no one from his people.  
None of his friends.  
I am just a woman trying to get by in a man's world.  
But Jesus seemed not to mind at all:  
Not my being a stranger, nor my being a woman.  
He drank from my bowl.  
We talked a long time.

Usually in our world men and women don't talk in such a way.  
He seemed to know all about me.  
And then he told me this important thing about the living water:  
"Everyone who drinks of this water will  
be thirsty again, but those who drink of  
the water that I will give them  
will never be thirsty."  
He had made me a life-changing promise that day.

I had to go and tell people.  
I knew they might laugh at me,  
And it was hard to break my silence.  
But what I had to tell them was so immense that,  
out of curiosity, they came to hear him for themselves.  
And they were convinced too.  
After the encounter with him  
they stopped regarding me the bad woman.  
Now I am the messenger,  
the bringer of good news,  
the woman who had met the Messiah.

It is fascinating how Jesus tears down barriers, walls that limit and separate people.  
There are so many people in this world who are not treated equally. People don't listen to them, and are unkind to them, even though they might have needed support and care. Many people are really lonely and afraid. And I am pretty sure, Jesus is to be found making friends with all those who otherwise nobody wants to speak to, nobody wants to be seen with, nobody cares for. Jesus takes them seriously and wants us to do the same. Jesus makes them feel welcome in this world, at home and wanted – and he wants us to do that too in the Galilee of our time. Jesus asks us to follow in that woman's footsteps and tell others about him and see the thirsts in life which only he can still.

*Among those who share...*

Another aspect of finding Jesus leads us to those people in this world who do not hold back what they have and who they are, but who share openly, willingly and fearlessly, and thus can be a blessing to others.  
Jesus talked a lot about how important it is to share things, especially when some people have a lot, and some people have hardly anything. He thought it essential to give and let go, to make sure that everyone had enough, and to experience the joy and the good feeling of having made others happy. A feeling just like this boy had:

**The story of the boy with the loaves and fishes:**

I like Jesus.  
I met him once.  
I'd gone with my friend's family to listen to him telling stories  
on the other side of the lake.  
My mom had packed me a picnic.

When it came to supper time,  
Jesus stopped talking to us, and said something quietly to his friends.  
They looked worried.  
I knew Andrew. He's from our village.  
I heard him say something about people being hungry.  
He was near me; and I pulled his sleeve;  
I told him that mom had packed me a picnic,  
and if anyone was hungry, they could share it with me.  
The man with Andrew heard me, but ignored me –  
grown-ups are like that sometimes...  
but Andrew grabbed me by the hand  
and took me to Jesus and told him what I'd said.  
Jesus took my picnic –  
the bread my mom had baked, the fish she'd bought on the market –  
and you know what happened next?  
Jesus shared my picnic with everyone.

I like Jesus.  
He listens to what people say.  
He listens to children.  
He cares about hungry people.  
He made me feel happy that I could help him.

With this story we discover a Jesus who loves to be among people who share good things. Things like meals, laughter, love and singing. People who share their time, their money, their problems...  
By sharing time and skills and money we may be able to contribute to a better world: where no one has to go to bed hungry, or without the medicine they need, or not being able to read, or fearful, or unloved... Jesus is there waiting for us to invest what we have got and let him help us share it!

*Among the people who are sad...*

And last of all today, I would like to invite us to think about finding Jesus among people who are sad. Sometimes Jesus does not take away people's sadness instantly, but listens to them, talks to them, accepts them, and offers them a way out, a way which they can go. He gives them a choice.  
He kept them company when they felt particularly low; and he reminded them that even though the loved one had gone away, the love was still there... He asked them to do something for him and gave them a reason to look forward and not just back.  
Like he did with this woman:

**Mary's story:**

I saw angels this morning, in the garden.  
Angels asking me why I was crying –  
do angels understand sadness?  
Do angels know what it is like to lose someone you've loved,  
to not know where they have gone?

Through my tears, I saw a man standing there in the distance.

I thought he was the gardener.  
I asked him if he'd moved the body of Jesus  
and he spoke to me.  
He called me by name:  
"Mary."  
I turned to him... I answered him:  
"Teacher."  
Through the ache of my tears I felt wonder and joy.  
I wanted that moment to last for ever,  
But he gave me a job to do.  
He sent me to tell the disciples what was happening.

I saw angels this morning...  
angels and Jesus.  
Now I know how I can go on living...

This is probably the most well known Easter story. Mary and the angels, Mary with the gardener, Mary finding Jesus and wanting to hold him fast. But she had to let him go in order to fulfil the mission he'd given her: to tell the world that he was alive and could be found among the living and not among the dead. May we do so, too.

These are simply some suggestions of places where I think people found Jesus then, and where I think we may find him now.  
We may not always recognise him; he may even look like someone we know...  
But he will be there...  
...among the children -  
...among the poor -  
...among outsiders -  
...among the people who share –  
...among the sad.  
He will be there – ahead of us – in Galilee...

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus,  
we are often looking for you in the wrong places;  
among the good and great and powerful,  
when we should know that you are to be found  
with the ordinary, the poor and the outcast.

Lord Jesus,  
we are often looking for you in the wrong places,  
at a safe distance,  
but you come so close to us,  
nearer to us than breathing.

We look for you in churchy things,  
but we are more likely to find you  
among the pots and pans,

or around the kitchen table...

We look for you in buildings,  
but you walked crowded streets,  
and shorelines,  
and mountains...

Even now, even after Easter,  
still we insist on trying to find you among the tombstones;  
among long-dead dogmas,  
in old, decaying fears and hurts,  
in the guilts and resentments we inhabit like a coffin.

But the angel said:  
Why do you look for him among the dead?  
He is not here.

Lord Jesus, help us to lay down the grave clothes,  
roll away the stone  
and come out into life,  
here and now.

We will find you  
among the living,  
ahead of us to the Galilee we seek.  
You have wrestled death to the ground,  
and now there is nowhere we can go,  
no darkness we can enter,  
which is not God-encompassed.  
Amen.