



Our gospel reading for today begins with a tomb – a place of burial. Sadly that's all part of a rather familiar landscape, whether in Ukraine or Gaza - or many other places in these sad times. We have very quickly become used to hearing about death. Five or so years ago we were beginning to understand the enormity of the Covid 19 pandemic. Then as now, numbers become even more poignant when we hear the names – specific stories of named individuals.

Our gospel reading about a tomb is one involving some named individuals – individuals who are bewildered and unsettled. Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb – it's early in the morning and still dark, and things are not as she had expected.

As Mary stands weeping outside the tomb someone speaks to her. She thinks it is the gardener, but then he speaks her name – 'Mary' – and she recognises that this person is Jesus risen from the dead. Suddenly in a moment everything changes, yet again, and it's personal and names are important.

What was inspiring through the time of uncertainty sparked by a pandemic was that, despite official orders to maintain *social distancing*, people seemed to be rediscovering the power of *social connection*. Thousands of us standing on our doorsteps or at our front gates, clapping and banging things to show appreciation for our superb and tragically underfunded NHS and all those who were serving us – that was *social togetherness*. Perhaps in adversity we were discovering more of what it means to be interdependent human beings, each with a name and a story.

At the heart of all this is love. Love which began with the love of God who created us to live in relationship with Him. Our God, who knows each of us by name and loves us, treasures us more than we can dare to imagine.

When Jesus speaks Mary's name she knows that love, and she wants to hold tight to Jesus. His death had brought a distancing which had been unbearable. Yet, Jesus speaks words to Mary which seem almost to impose a distancing: '*Do not hold on to me*'. Then he speaks strange words about ascending. Strange words that will become a reality in due course when the risen Jesus leaves the earth and the Holy Spirit will come to be Christ's presence in us in every time and every place.

Standing by the empty tomb, Mary doesn't understand any of that. She has encountered the risen Christ and now she wants life to go back to normal – life as she had known it. Yet it cannot and it will not. Life will never be the same again.

But I yearn for us to take hold of the certainty that nothing can undo the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It has happened. And nothing can separate us from the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Not even wars, seemingly demented world leaders, or a pandemic. Not even death. Nothing can change the reality that you and I are named individuals – unique and precious – known by God and known by name.

And in our confusion and in our 'not understanding', and in our places of fear and grief, Jesus draws closer than close, not in physical body but in spirit. And Jesus speaks our name and invites us to speak his – to reach out and to say yes to his love and his forgiveness. May it be so, this Easter and always.