

Archbishop Stephen delivered the sermon during the Festal Eucharist at York Minster today. This follows in full.

“(Jesus) asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’” John 20. 15

For those of you who made it through this Holy Week, here at York Minster, you will have heard a series of beautiful and challenging sermons from the Dean, on the last words of Jesus from the cross. But on this morning, we, with great surprise and rejoicing, encounter the risen Lord and consider his first words. And the first words of Jesus on the first Easter morning, are not as we would expect.

And if you're sitting there wondering what those first words are, if it had been me on the first Easter day – if you'll forgive such a thought! - then I think there would have been a shout of triumph. It has I mean, after all, it's been quite a weekend, isn't it? You know, you would forgive Jesus for a little bit of uncharacteristic triumphalism on such an occasion as the resurrection. He might have said, I've risen from the dead. I've forgiven the sins of the world. I go for the things of glory. If you read that you wouldn't be surprised.

But sometimes a still small voice is louder. And the actual words that Jesus spoke on that first Easter morning, to Mary Magdalene, well, they are still reverberating around the world.

I find it beautiful and astonishing that what he actually says is, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'

And still, not recognising him, Mary opens up her heart to him.

And because the Easter faith we proclaim and celebrate today is all about love, or not really very much about anything at all, then we can also identify a golden thread running through the whole story of the gospel, and reaching its climax in Jesus's death and resurrection.

This golden thread is love. It is compassion. And it is inviting us to find a way to justice. And love is always looking for love to be returned. Always searching. And by asking these questions, Jesus is forming first with Mary Magdalene and then with others, with us here today, a new community in his name with a new purpose for the world.

So, on the night, before he dies, giving us the new commandment to love one another, he washes his disciples' feet. And on the cross, he turns the other cheek, and walks the extra mile, forgives those who nail him there, and reaches out to the not exactly very penitent thief, who, in the last chance saloon of life, reaches out to him. And even on the first Easter day, when you might have imagined Jesus rising with a shout of triumph, he turns to Mary with compassionate concern, and reaches out to the sorrow in her heart.

And since this is how God is revealed to us in Christ, the one whose character and very nature is service, compassion, love, then it must also be the case that this is how God comes among us today, on Easter Day,- even to those who don't yet recognise him.

He says to us, here in York Minster on this Easter morning, and across the world, and especially in situations where people are hurting or grieving, he says to us in a still small voice of calm, why are you weeping?

And if you're a third child, in a family, whose universal credit has been limited to two, you might say to Jesus why does my birth have to be such a problem for my parents and my siblings? This is why I'm weeping.

And if you're an Eritrean asylum seeker who came to this country in a little boat across the channel, and are awaiting possible resettlement in Rwanda, you might say to Jesus, why am I being punished for fleeing persecution, where can I find justice and compassion in this world. This is why I'm weeping.

And if you're a hard-working, single parent, who can't make ends meet, you might say to Jesus, I'm having to choose between food and fuel, and if my kids need a new pair of shoes there is simply nothing left to pay for them. This is why I'm weeping.

And if you're a young Ukrainian graduate who volunteered to defend your country, and is now on the front line in Kherson and sheltering from enemy fire, and unable to get to church today, and can only sing alleluia in your heart, you might say to Jesus, my heart is broken with the madness of this war. I haven't seen my family for months. I live with death each day. This is why I'm weeping.

Or I'm a fisherman living on the Polynesian island of Tuvalu and the sea levels are rising, and my whole world is sinking, why, doesn't this world care, those whose actions across the globe melt ice caps, hack down forests, and are steadily killing, well, everything. This is why I'm weeping.

Or I was trafficked into a place where I have no identity, agency or freedom. Or I am a survivor of sexual abuse and my whole life is scarred, and no one takes responsibility. This is why I'm weeping.

Or what about you?

What sorrows and fears have you brought to church this morning? What griefs and hurts are locked inside? What do you want to say to Jesus about your tears? And what do you long to hear from him?

And Jesus, again to Mary unrecognised, asks another question - perhaps, the most important question any human being can face - 'Who are you looking for?' Which means I suppose, 'Who will you follow? How will you set your compass? What are the values you propose living by? What do you believe? And whom do you trust?'

And because there are no easy, off-the-shelf answers to the huge problems facing our world, and all the different hurts and sorrows we carry; and because we don't know the way to go, what God offers us, amidst these trials and challenges, is a companion. A guide. Someone to be with us. Someone who knows what it's like to be us. Someone alongside us and to show us the way. Someone to show us what being human is supposed to look like.

This won't solve all our problems. But it will change the way we tackle them. It will cast them in a different light. And, frankly, as I look around the world today, without the compassion, service, love and justice that we see and experience in Jesus, we will never find peace in our world, nor any way through the intractable and confronting challenges we face.

'I'm looking for Jesus,' said Mary. Actually, she's speaking to the Jesus she is looking for but she doesn't yet recognise, because, he is alive with a

new and transformed life, which is the hope, and the promise that, despite all of life's difficulties and challenges, there is a better future and an eternal hope.

And Jesus, then speaks her name. 'Mary,' he says. And her eyes are opened and she recognises him.

Dear friends, in this moment we find the greatest hope of all, and the most important message of Easter: we only know and recognise God, when we know God knows and recognises us. Jesus reaches out to the sorrow in Mary's heart and he speaks her name. And in the knowledge that we are known by God, of inestimable value and deeply loved, we can rise up and build a better world, a world ordered by the love, compassion and justice that we see in Jesus, so that we respond to the world in the same way that Jesus responds to us.

Because as we know it is easy to be cynical and to despair. It is so easy to think that things can never change. That death and evil and injustice have the last word. And that all you can do is make the best of what you've got in the years left to you. And then protect that keenly.

The reason we are here today, on Easter day says something else. Things can be different. Things can be better. That expectations can be turned around. And this is very good news indeed.

It is worth celebrating. So, open those Easter eggs when you get home. Crack open the champagne. Put some red stripe in the fridge. Bake a very large cake. Stop off for a kebab from the caravan on the ring road. Order lots of curry. Invite everyone in. Turn the music up loud. Wear your most outrageous hat. Pucker up. Make a noise. Celebrate. Something better is beginning. A new hope is stirring. Tap your feet to a new rhythm of joy and hope. Because Jesus is risen from the dead. He is reaching out to the sorrows in our hearts. He is inviting us to follow him. He is calling us by name.

Amen



