



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Easter 2021

In the name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

A year ago, the doors of this parish church were locked and for the first time since the thirteenth century the people of St Marylebone were not allowed to gather together to celebrate the service from which all other Christian services derive - the great Easter Feast, the Paschal Mysteries which make, shape and uphold our faith and our belief and which underpin our day-to-day living as Christians.

We weren't alone, of course, as the Covid-19 virus began to take hold not just of a country, but of the whole world.

A year on, things are, thanks to many sacrifices and the extraordinary roll-out of anti-viral vaccines, easier, but not solved.

I wonder how many billions of words have been used to try and explain the world's pandemic crisis and all that pertains to it? How many words will have been wept or screamed by the friends and relatives and lovers of the 3 million men women and children who have died over the past twelve months as a result of Corona Virus?

Words, sentences, paragraphs, tweets, books seem to define us as human beings.

We try, and usually fail, to express our deepest feelings, our most complex emotions and the unfathomable mysteries in which we find ourselves with words; what else can we do?

But we also use words to veil, to obfuscate to clothe our naked embracement, our shame, our impotence, our ignorance in the face of death, or mystery or the inability to make a difference.

Even when we know that there are no words up to the task, they still pour out from our lips in nonsensical torrents.

In the Book of Job, Job's friends come to comfort him. How do they set about doing it, they speak rubbish for seven interminably long days!

Throughout the days that lead up to his arrest, trial and Passion, Jesus words are very few and far between.

On Maundy Thursday, for example, there are just two words spoken by Jesus, which encapsulate the whole day; the day during which he shares a final meal with his closest friends, is betrayed and arrested and dragged before Caiaphas, before being dispatched to the Roman Governor for sentence.

“Do this!”

Jesus' economy of language meant that his disciples needed to hold-on to very little through the devastatingly confusing events that followed that fateful last supper.

“Do this”: wash each other's feet, become a servant to your brothers and your sisters. Do as I have done in placing myself at your service, placing myself into your hands.

“Do this”: take bread and wine and, in so doing, know that, forever, until God's Kingdom comes, I am with you – no matter what happens to you.

“Do this”: be my living, witnessing, worshipping, body and my blood in the world.

On Good Friday, Jesus needed only three words, just one word in Greek, *tetelesthai*, “It is finished”, “it is accomplished”, “it is over” - the point at which the universe entered into what has been termed “the long silence”ⁱ

The “long silence” in which there are no words, could be no words; the long silence in which God himself hanged dead on a cross - wood which earth had given and human hands had made.

The “long silence” during which the lifeless body of him through whom all life had come into being, lay cold in a borrowed, stone-sealed tomb.

The “long silence” in which the music of the spheres itself was hushed.

The “long silence” which could, at last, absorb and resolve all the misplaced words that had ever, or could ever be spoken.

Now, the “long silence” of Good Friday and Holy Saturday is over.

The Magdalene has visited the tomb and has found it to be empty.

And then, suddenly, unexpectedly, for her, and for us and for the whole of creation, the “long silence” is broken, not by trumpets nor fanfares nor even by a joyous proclamation of the finest and most wisely chosen words, but by a *single* word, a single word gently and quietly whispered - “Mary!”, a word, a name she has known and waited to hear all her life.

One word is all that it took to change everything, not just for Mary, but for everyone - and everything - everywhere!

Today, Jesus calls us by name, Jack, Stephen, Katy, Rosie, Will, Opeoluwa, Florence, Sharina, Rosa, Parsam.

The risen Christ stands among us and calls us by name, calls us by name because we are his.

Today, on this blessed Easter Day, let us open our ears and listen for Jesus calling us, calling by name, inviting us into his new life, summoning us into his new creation.

The only word that we need in reply is “Alleluia!”

Alleluia! For Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

ⁱ Archbishop of L'Aquila, Good Friday 2009, after an earthquake which destroyed much of his diocese.