

Sunday

KLIPPIES KRITZINGER

Ruri, Morena o tsogile! Impela, Nkosi ivukile! The Lord has risen indeed! Die Heer het waarlik opgestaan!

Every Easter Sunday, for more than two thousand years now, this joyful greeting has announced the victory of Christ over the power of death, sin and evil. It is the heart of Christian faith. Death did not have the last word over the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Death will not have the last word over us. It is this assurance that enables us to persevere and not to give up, even when we become tired of caring.

If the crucifixion was a surprise, his disappearance on Sunday morning was a shock and his resurrection appearances even more so. The first appearance, according to John 20:11-18, was to Mariam of Magdala. She thought he was the gardener, until he said "Mariam!" This is the shortest sermon in the Bible: "Mariam!" and the shortest prayer: "Rabbouni!" Sometimes one word is enough.

The resurrection is the turning point in world history; the in-breaking of the new creation, the decisive arrival of the Age to Come: "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). And the first witness of this momentous event is a peasant woman from rural Galilee. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. Value and respect the Mariams; they are bearers of hope.

Being part of the new creation means witness and service, so Mariam becomes the first apostle, rightly called "the apostle to the apostles," sent by the risen Lord to proclaim his message: "Go and tell my brothers..." Listen to the voices of the Mariams; they are bearers of faith.

Mariam was the first witness of the resurrection because she arrived at his tomb to embalm his body with spices when the others were still sleeping. She was the first to see him because she stayed there weeping at the open tomb, when Peter and the other disciple had gone home, puzzled. Follow in the footsteps of the Mariams, they are bearers of love.

In the early church new members were baptised on Easter Sunday before sunrise. They faced West, looking into darkness and renouncing the devil with all his works, then turned around to face East, confessed Jesus as Lord, and stepped into the water to be baptised. This became a key image of what it means to be Christian: To be awake before sunrise and turn your face to the East, to the dawning Day and the bright Morning Star: "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (Eph. 5:14).

Being Christian is to be wide awake early in the morning like Mariam of Magdala, seeking his face, living into his promised future: "Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light..." (Rom. 13:11-12). We are not living at five minutes to midnight, preparing to "meet our doom" (as some preachers used to say). It is early in the morning, not five minutes to twelve but twelve minutes to five: the night is far gone; the day is near.

It is this hopefulness, this "daybreak ethos" that sustained the early church, even in times of persecution and suffering. It is the ethos that we need in this pandemic time: an indestructible hope, not because we are optimists, not because "this too will pass," but because the Day is dawning; because it is already light in the East; because the bright Morning Star is out and is shining on us;

So we wake up from our sleep and put on the armour of light, ready to wage peace, love, faith and hope in the name of our risen Lord.

Live the life of the Day, even though it has not yet fully dawned. Live God's future now, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This resurrection hope does not paralyse us in the face of evil. It does not make us long for heaven since we are tired of the earth. Because the coming Day will be a new heaven and earth where justice dwells, we work for justice now. Because one day all tears will be wiped from our faces, we wipe tears from people's faces now.

Because one day we will move into the Father's house with its many rooms, we make room for people now, we give them shelter. Because one day we will occupy the city with foundations, built by God, we work now until this city has foundations for the homes of all its people.

Do not give up hope for the homeless people in your care. Do not give up hope for the City of Tshwane. Do not give up hope for your own imperfect efforts. Christ is risen. He is the bright Morning Star. Turn your face to the East and keep on moving towards Him. Get up early with Mariam of Magdala and seek his face.

Prayer

God of life, we praise you
for the dawning of the new creation
for overcoming the power of death and evil
for raising the Lord Jesus from the dead
to be our bright Morning Star
our indestructible hope

God of hope, we turn our faces to the dawn
Fill us with the power of your Spirit
So that we will never despair or give up
But live your promised future now

And be wide awake, moving deeper into your light

Lord Jesus, bright Morning Star
Please keep shining on us
Protect us from evil and danger

Surround us with your loving care
Now and forever.
Amen

Blessing (Heb.13:20-21)

Now may the God of peace,
who through the blood of the eternal covenant
brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that
great Shepherd of the sheep,
equip you with everything good for doing his will,
and may he work in us what is pleasing to him,
through Jesus Christ,
to whom be glory

for ever and ever.
Amen.