

## EASTER DAY SERMON – Run!

John 20: 1-18

I remember once looking at some school assembly material for Easter, and I was interested to see that the suggested visual aid for Easter Day was a pair of Nike trainers. To anyone who knows me it won't come as a surprise that I don't own a pair of Nike trainers. But the point is that the word Nike goes with the picture on the front cover of our service sheet today, because Nike is Greek for victory. Just think of all those amazing ads for world famous athletes racing headlong for victory. Today Christ is victor, and the picture shows him with one foot poised on the edge of the tomb, almost poised to spring into this new life and hit the ground running.



Speaking as someone who loathed every school sports day I can ever remember – last in the egg-and-spoon race, last in the sack race, last in the three-legged race and every other wretched race – this isn't an image that works for me very easily. That is, it doesn't work if Jesus has done this for himself – like those kids we can all remember in school who were brilliant at everything, almost as if there was nothing to it. Resurrection? No sweat!

If this is how it works, then there's no hope for me. I'm stuck at the starting line; I'm dead in the tomb. But this isn't how it happened. And the Bible is absolutely specific so we don't miss the point. Jesus didn't rise from the dead. God RAISED Jesus from the dead. The God who says "This is my Beloved", his whisper of love was again heard in the darkness of the tomb. Rise up, my Jesus, rise up my Beloved. Resurrection begins from within, not by flexing your muscles, but by hearing the Word that speaks everything into life, including you.

Not being able to keep up in the race of life is something many of us experience, that sense of being left behind, stuck. It is a kind of death, a tomb. But isn't it most people's experience that it is only the loving voice of another that can raise you up and get you moving again?

The Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore expressed the despair of Mary Magdalene when she thinks everything is over, or of any of us when it seems like your life has come to a dead end. "I thought that my voyage had come to its end at the last limits of my power, that the path before me was closed, that provisions were exhausted and the time come to take shelter in a silent obscurity. But I find that thy will knows no end in me. When old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders."

For me that just says so beautifully how new life breaks out inside us like a spring of living water. We can't do it for ourselves (although we can often do it for others). It's simply a

gift, a mystery and an unexpected joy. God's will knows no end in Jesus; God's will knows no end in Mary Magdalene; and God's will knows no end in you, or me.

Sadly, this isn't a transformation that will turn you into an Olympic athlete. But it can turn you into the YOU that maybe you're longing to be. The risen Jesus in our picture still bears his wounds – the very tokens of his failure and dereliction. They haven't vanished, God hasn't magicked them away. Because they're part of him, part of the road he's travelled – indeed, our old hymns describe them as his “trophy”, And it's the same with our wounds. They're part of the person who is you, part of your dignity and worth – part of the new person, still being created, brought to life by the calling of your name.

The stricken Mary Magdalene, blinded by her own tears, burdened by a lifetime of rejection, is raised up by one word: “Mary!” And this is her moment of victory. Because this woman, a woman, a woman with a past, becomes the herald of the Resurrection. She's first past the post, first to utter the words: “I have seen the Lord!” Hearing her name, spoken in love, is enough to get Mary moving, to give her a purpose and a mission and something to live the rest of her life for.

And this is Christ's gift to us this morning. God speaks your name with love today; he crowns all your failures and mine with victory; and he calls us to set off into the rest of our lives like sprinting athletes. So we lace up our spiritual Nikes and we run, into our futures, into a new day, into a new country filled with wonders.