



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus said,
'Do not hold on to me.'

St John 20. 1-18

Sunday 5th April

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

John Hussey was the Dean of Chichester Cathedral from 1955 to 1977. During his time there, he commissioned many works of art to glorify God and to beautify the cathedral; textiles, glass, metalwork, textiles, music art. It is in this last category that we owe him a debt of gratitude for commissioning John Sutherland to paint the picture, 'Noli me tangere' – 'Do not hold on to me' which is used as this week's illustration.

It may seem wholly removed from our visualisation of Easter morning. No empty tombs. No surprised disciples. No angels. No grave clothes. No body. Instead St John describes an encounter with one of Jesus' disciples, Mary Magdalene, who was desperate in her grief and could not wanting a connection with him. She went to the tomb, and found to her horror and sadness that it was empty. In her desolation, she poured out her needs and hopes to a stranger, a gardener – so she thought. But it was the risen Christ. After she recognised him by his greeting, 'Mary', she wanted to resume her former relationship with him, but he denies her, saying, 'Do not hold into me.'

- What does Jesus mean by this?
- Do you recognise Mary's needs and understand them?
- How would you react in her place to Jesus' words?
- Have you ever felt the need to pour out your grief to a stranger – why?
- In grief, how necessary is it to let go?

Jesus gets Mary to admit her hopes and her fears. She is devastated by his death on the cross, so she is weeping. She is looking for earthly contact, so she is searching. She is looking for an answer to the body's absence, so she asks. She wants reassurance, so she is given it. She wants to hold on to the past, so she is given a sight of the future.

For St John, this is the essence of the resurrection. Just as his gospel begins with the birth of Jesus from a theological and philosophical perspective – no angels, shepherds or cave, just 'the word was made flesh' – so his description of the resurrection is not a physical one. Instead, he gets right to the heart of the matter: all those who seek Jesus must look to the resurrection, his rising from the dead, rather than just to his human life.

- What do you understand by 'the empty tomb'?
- How did you come to believe that Jesus is risen (even if, perhaps, you're still struggling)?
- Are you tempted to cling to the past – why?
- What would make you feel more confident in facing the future?
- Can you believe that Jesus speaks to you by name?

The resurrection of Jesus – Easter – gives hope to all. Not just for today, in these darkened times of coronavirus, but hope to overcome all that life throws at us, even death itself.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!