

John 20:16f (NRSV) Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." '

Jesus asked Mary to do the most difficult thing in her life. She had been through what seemed a nightmare. The person she had loved more than anyone else in the world had been taken and crucified. The man who had healed her and had given her life meaning and purpose had died an agonising criminal's death. Two days earlier she had seen his lifeless body sealed in a tomb. Now he was standing in front of her. She fell at his feet in disbelief, in joy, in wonder. She clung onto him – she was not going to let anyone take him again – she never wanted to go through that agony again – she was never going to let go of him.

Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me' She was going to have to let go of him and trust the promise he was to make to all his close friends when he left them for the last time, 'I will be with you always, to the end of time.' (Mt.28:20 REB)

That promise was probably very well known to a man named John who wrote the book in the Bible we call Revelation. He had been going through a rough time lately. Many of his fellow Christians had been persecuted, some even killed because of their faith, and he had been banished to an island so he could not see his friends. John probably wondered whether Jesus was still really with him and his friends. Then one Sunday, as he tried to picture all his friends gathering together in a house to pray and sing and read together about Jesus, he had a vision. He saw, like Mary, Jesus standing in front of him, and, like Mary, he fell at his feet.

He didn't look like a gardener this time. *Rev.1:12-16 (NRSV) I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.*

This time Jesus took hold of him and said, ***"Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever"*** *Rev.1:17f.* John had seen Jesus walking among seven lampstands and holding seven stars in his hand. Jesus then told him, ***"As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."*** *Rev.1:20*

John was to write to those churches and tell them what he had seen. Many were the times when they all had wondered if Jesus was still with them. Many were the times that they felt their grip on their faith was slipping. What John now saw was that no matter how weakly he held onto his faith, Jesus had a firm hold upon him and all his fellow Christians.

That is perhaps the most important lesson of Easter Day. When we have entrusted ourselves to Jesus, no matter how slack our grip upon him becomes, his grip upon us is ever firm and not even death can shake it free. It was in letting go that Mary discovered that Jesus would never let go of her.

Let us pray: ***In his right hand he held seven stars.***

Psa.139:1ff O Lord, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You mark out my journeys and my resting place and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but you, O Lord, know it altogether. You encompass me behind and before and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go then from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, your right hand hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will cover me and the light around me turn to night,' even darkness is no darkness with you; the night is as clear as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.

You ... lay your hand upon me. Your right hand shall hold me fast.