Throughout February, every morning without fail, I walked 2 miles into the sunrise. Watching the weather change around me – the seagulls volume increase, and the sea levels vary depending on the tides, but every morning without fail the sun would rise.

I would wake blinking with my alarm clock at 5.45am, head heavy with sleep and eyes not quite ready for the day, but I would drag myself out of bed, shove my shoes on my tender feet and push myself out of the door. And without fail, the sun would rise.

Some of you might be wondering why I made myself do this? 2 miles every morning for 28 days in a row, during one of the wettest months of the year. And it’s a valid question – because at surface level, it seems a bit bonkers. But there were good reasons behind it.

I was raising money and awareness for the charity Refuge that supports women and children affected by domestic abuse, and with every step that I walked, I carried in my heart the stories and the voices of the women who have been silenced because of human violence and aggression. The narratives that we may never get to hear. But need to do all we can to give space for them.

Our gospel passage today shines a light on one woman’s story, most of which will also have been lost throughout time but whose actions and whose tears changed the course of history.

Mary Magdalene was stood outside the tomb weeping. She had come to anoint the body of Jesus and finding the stone rolled away, had run to get the other disciples, they journeyed back with her – but finding the tomb empty and the linen cloth folded to the side, they left and returned to their homes.

But Mary stayed and wept. And then he arrived.

At first, she does not recognise him, her eyes blinded with grief, she thinks he is the gardener. And in some ways, in that moment, she is absolutely correct. For was not this the man who had planted seeds of hope in their hearts? Was not this the person who had called himself the True Vine, and promised growth and fruit if you abide in him? Was not this the storyteller who had spun words of a sower, and budding seeds sprouting from the soil?  
  
This was indeed the gardener. Her teacher and her friend.  
  
Mary too, was no stranger to violence, for years she had lived with demons, we are never told explicitly of what nature – they could have been physical ailments, mental health struggles, trauma from past experiences – either way they left her debilitated and without hope. Until she met Jesus. Jesus – who by word or healing touch – had somehow made Mary of Magdala new. He had given her worth, dignity and a fresh start befitting her status as a beloved child of God. He had made her new.

No wonder she wept, no wonder she ran with the speed of love, no wonder she bellowed, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!”

In the moment of her healing, little did she know that Jesus too would soon not be a stranger to violence. Would have his body beaten and his hands and feet pierced. That he too, would know the crushing blows of mockery and the degradation that comes with sneers.

No wonder she wept. And no wonder we weep as we look out on our world, as we reflect on how different Easter will be in Gaza, in the Holy Land and in Ukraine and many other places. How the story of the resurrection cannot be separated from the violence that reverberates through those lands and in our own, and shakes the core of its people.

Mary did not allow herself to block out the pain, to ignore it or worse be apathetic to it. The Reverend Fadi Diab, an Anglican Priest in the West Bank states, “As we go through what seems like an endless night, the church is called to engage, not retreat, to help transform pain into hope and oppression into liberation.”

Mary was transformed because she stayed and wept on Easter day – she encountered Jesus because she stayed. She stayed present to suffering and allowed it to move her to action. And his risen life shone on her face that morning as he called her by her name.

Jesus honours our tears, he honours our anguish and he honours when we stay present to those in need and he works through it.

This morning we see God’s response to violence, we see the holy Trinity at work, breaking the chains of human destruction and from that point of death, life pours out and a new community of hope arises.

Resurrection, does not ignore the violence in the world. Resurrection says “Yes” Yes it is that bad. You don’t have to minimise it. There is a place for the uncomfortable, hard truths about our lives and about our world. But it also says Yes to your hopes. Yes, to the thing that seems improbable, impossible, and yet is here, now.

Christ is risen from the dead, he has hallowed hell, journeyed into the depths of darkness ensuring that no area of our human experience is absent from his light. So that even in the deepest darkness we can hear a voice calling us, and we can reach for a hand to grasp us and lift us out.

We are that new community of hope, and like Mary, are called to be present, to be beacons of his resurrection light in every place that we go, whatever we encounter, so that what Christ began on the cross can expand and expand and expand until that day when the fullness of God’s Kingdom will be here on earth and Peace will reign.

Today renews that promise, that no matter what we throw at it, no matter how hard we resist, no matter what lies on the horizon – that like my early morning walks, without fail, the Son will always rise. Alleluia, Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia. Amen.