Part of what makes the narratives of Resurrection Dawn so believable as being eyewitness accounts is the chaos they contain- the detail, the honesty, the confusion. Peter and John rush to the scene, peer inside, and rush away again, achieving absolutely nothing.

But thankfully John the Gospel- writer doesn’t just have their record of events to go off- ran to the tomb, saw no/ body, ran away again- he has the record, the eye-witness record, of the one person who was there on Good Friday at the foot of the cross and helped to bury Jesus and who went there before dawn on Easter Day, as soon as she could. Only Mary Magdalene was there at the end on Friday and at the new beginning today. In any poll of “Best disciple” Mary should be the winner- constant, determined, courageous and true.

While everyone else is running round like, well, headless Easter chickens, Mary is not. She is focused, reflective, grieving. Her stillness and steadiness mean that she is open to what God is doing. Did Peter and John got to the tomb so quickly that they beat the Angels to it? Or were they there all of the time but it needed Mary’s calm stillness for them to be spotted?

If you want someone to guide you through grief then what Mary shows us this morning is a great place to start- don’t rush, don’t look for corners to cut. Be kind to yourself. Give yourself time and space. Do what you need to do. Don’t let others rush you or drag you along. Let yourself, for a time, be the centre of your world.

And if you want someone to show you how to be a disciple, choose Mary. Mary goes to the tomb to be close to her Lord, so hurriedly buried on Friday. She needs to be close to him. She finds the tomb open and tells Peter and John, and follows them back to the tomb. She stays there weeping. She is not distracted from her purpose or her longing- she stays- and when she peers in to try to make sense of things she sees the angels, and then she turns and sees the gardener who turns out to the Gardener of all Creation, and he calls her by name and she hugs him. And then she is sent to gather the disciples, to be the apostle to the apostles.

Being a disciple, Mary shows us, is about putting yourself in the position to be found and used by God. It’s about moving carefully, slowly, not rushing from one shiny thing to the next. It is about living with uncertainty and confusion in the context of deep faith.

It is about moments of deep and joyous encounter when we touch God and hear him call us by name. It is about being willing to speak love and truth, to tell our own story which has woven throughout it this Easter story- that love wins in the end- not just that we think that or hope that but know it, and believe it, and have felt it- that we not alone ever,

that even dark death cannot quench the light for ever

and even brutal militaristic regimes which have no interest in justice cannot stamp hope out for ever

and even that wicked voice which whispers in the night-time when sleep flees from us that we are not good enough, not enough, not worthy enough, not lovable enough

will be drowned out by the voice of the Risen Christ speaking simply our name with such pride and delight and, yes, such love.

Because love wins, you know. It just does. It will not be put off by our mistakes. It will not be diverted by our lukewarmness. It will not be scared away by our fear. Love wins. And then, gently, patiently, without force, without intrusion, love comes to us quietly in the garden in the early morning light. Love gently asks how we are, why we weep, what we search for.

Love listens. And then Love speaks our name, turning it into the most beautiful sound in the world- and in that one word, those few syllables, are peace and confidence and a certainty which is literally breath-taking. In that one word, those few syllables, fear and unworthiness are banished. Death and darkness flee away. In that one word, those few syllables, we are home, returned to Eden’s glade, returned to Galilee’s shore, returned to our heart’s true homeland. In that one word, those few syllables, we become what we were born to be and spend our lives in search of- we are seen, known, accepted. We know ourselves beloved on the earth.

And Mary does it. Even in the depth of her despair and confusion on this insane and disastrous morning she is still open to God. She alone sees the angels. She alone sees the gardener. She alone hears her name spoken on lips she never thought would breathe or speak again. She alone touches the Risen Christ, and receives her mission, her call.

We know, this year, how precious touch is, how hard it is not to be able to shake hands, or hug someone who is crying, or wrap a friend or grandchild in a bear-like embrace. It doesn’t say how long Mary embraced Jesus. I rather hope he liked it. I rather hope he needed that touch as much as Mary did. I rather hope that he squeezed her back as tightly as she hugged him, and as long. I know that I would. I know that I would want to- disbelief and thanksgiving and tenderness and friendship and wonder and togetherness and deep bubbling joy all expressed in a hug better than words can. Some moments work best with a big, long, squeezing embrace which contains everything of the heart, which conveys meaning and delight so much more effectively than words. Mary, he says. Teacher, she says. And they embrace. I rather hope he liked it. I rather hope he needed that touch as much as Mary did.

And then he tells her not to hold on to him. Don’t touch me is a poor translation- it’s not touch Jesus fears, it’s clinging. It’s Mary being frozen here in aspic for ever. It’s Mary thinking that everything is going back to being as it was. This whole thing has been about changing the world- Jesus hasn’t done this, died in agony, harrowed hell, returned to the light- so that things can go back to how they were.

Jesus doesn’t want Mary clinging to him. He wants to fire her like an arrow and watch her fly. He wants to turn the world upside down. He wants to scatter love and justice and peace and hope and welcome and community and kindness and courage across time and space, one heart at a time, one life at a time, one spoken name at a time.

He needs Mary to start that chain reaction which has never stopped since. Go he tells her. And then, to the disciples, Go. And today he meets us in the garden. He calls us by name. He embraces us. And then he tells us to Go and turn the world upside down.