

## Reflection for Easter Sunday 2020

**Text: John 20: 1, 11-18**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. (But) Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold onto me, because I have not yet ascended to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Anyone who has experienced grief in their lives will be able to empathise with Mary's inconsolable grief as she stood beside that empty tomb on that first Easter morning. Whatever her motives in coming, whatever she had expected to find as she made her way through that quiet, dawn hushed garden it was not an empty tomb! Presumably, she had just come to feel herself near to her Lord's broken body, to express prayers that spoke of her own heartache and longing together with prayers for the blessing of eternal peace for Jesus, her truest and dearest friend and to allow herself to weep alone and unwatched. Weep the tears of deepest, most heartfelt sorrow for this man who had completely changed her life around; changed it in a way she could never have begun to imagine. A way that had revealed a glimpse of the true power and infinite grace of God's love towards His children however sinful or damaged they might be.

She had become one of a small group of women who followed Jesus and it is easy to imagine that these devoted female disciples took the responsibility for ensuring that Jesus was looked after and cared for with a sustaining meal or some clean clothes whenever he needed them. I am sure that one way or another there were a multitude of little touches by these women to

express their love of this man who meant so much to them and had filled their lives with the light and love of His presence.

But now He is dead; He has been laid in that pristine tomb and no more will there be opportunities for little touches of love, of grace, to offer Him but the one Mary Magdalene offers this morning, the touch of her presence at his last resting place and the fall of her tears. How infinitely small such gestures; how infinitely loving.

But when she summons up the courage to look into that hollowed space she sees not a corpse wrapped in spices and linen clothes as she had expected but in its place she beholds two angels, one where the head would have rested, one at the feet. It is all but impossible to imagine her feelings and I think there must have been an element of the sort of thinking that told her that she must surely be seeing things; these apparitions could not be real; must surely have been conjured by her febrile state of mind. But even as she reasoned with herself these angelic messengers spoke to her and questioned those cascading tears; ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ What a question to ask her now, here in all places; did they not know exactly why she wept? But she responded to their question expressing her utter bewilderment as to where her Lord’s body could possibly be. Who had come and removed it with what she probably thought of as unfeeling, uncaring, insensitive hands from this place of rest?

And, not waiting for an answer she turns back and is confronted by the figure of a man; a man she assumes could only be the gardener; the gardener who must surely know where the body of Jesus has been taken. A man whom she at first fails to recognise for it seems as if, in this first resurrection encounter, nothing about him touches her memory of the man she followed with such loving devotion. But then he speaks her name and it is in hearing His voice that she is given that ‘eureka’ moment and knows without a shadow of doubt that here in front of her is the living Christ, the living Saviour here with her in this God kissed garden. Here before her is the Teacher, the man whose teaching has embraced her thinking and shown her the path of true knowledge. What a moment; a moment surely when it could almost be true that her heart stood still. A moment touched by wonder, by awe, by mystery and most of all by the rebirth of love and of hope in the place of grief and hopelessness.

And I’m sure that as that moment passes her immediate impulse is to hold and hug him; hold and hug that scarred and wounded body; gently to touch those terrible symbols of all that He had suffered. But it was not to be; the resurrected Christ had in some way we cannot begin to understand moved away from the physical touch which could only be felt by a very few so that

His spiritual touch could be felt by all who chose to come to Him both in their times of need and in their times of praise and thanksgiving. To come in times of need to be embraced in consoling and healing love and in the times of celebration and delight to be embraced in shared joy and happiness.

Did Mary understand all this or was she disconcerted at His refusal to allow another intimate touch? I like to think that just as she had been chosen to become the first witness to Christ's resurrection she was given understanding through the words He spoke to her that His journey was not yet quite completed and that He must first return to the Father that they might be One. The Word that had become flesh must once again be fully united with God.

Whatever the truth of one thing there could be no doubt Mary Magdalene had indeed seen the risen Lord on that first Easter morning in all the peaceful serenity of that garden.

And what is it we see this Easter morning as we awake not to church going and family get togethers, not to Easter egg hunts or a shared meal of the traditional roast lamb but to another day of lockdown? A day when we continue to be isolated maybe completely alone or with just a few companions who are sharing this undreamed-of existence with us. Are our hearts full of Alleluias and the joy that the remembrance of this day of Christ's resurrection should bring? Or are we still cowering behind the locked doors of fear and apprehension for the future? Are we allowing the hope of the dawning of Easter to counteract our fears our anxieties and thus allow us to rejoice in this new day alone? This day when the first witness to Christ's resurrection began a movement of hope, a movement of light that has spread around God's world. A movement that has shone in the darkest places as witnessed by so many, down through the centuries. Cardinal Basil Hume wrote of such hope in these words: 'Hope is knowing that I have been forgiven, my guilt removed. Hope is knowing that there is a future, a life after death. Hope is knowing that there is love, that there is a God, and I am loved by him. Whatever happens he *does* care. Hope is knowing that he has plans, even if I do not understand them.' Emily Dickinson gave a beautiful definition of hope which fits perfectly for this Holy week's theme of touching: 'Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul. And sings the tune without words. And never stops at all.'

Those first witnesses to the resurrection could have no possible idea what the future held for them, indeed at that very time it was still a dangerous and most uncertain place for them but none of this mattered; whatever fears, whatever uncertainty they might have entertained no such anxieties would or could surrender to the hope which they had been given.

So we too this Easter morning are surely called to emulate their example and to allow the light of hope to shine in us this God given day and with a loud voice echo our alleluias with those of the angels and all those witnesses to this same eternal hope who have walked this earth before us. Alleluia, alleluia, Christ is risen; He is risen indeed!

*Live in faith and hope, though it be in darkness, for in this darkness God protects the soul. Cast your care upon God for you are still His and He will not forget you. Do not think that he is leaving you alone for that would be to wrong Him* *St John of the Cross*

**Who are you looking for?** Ian Adams

Don't answer too fast.

You can scan the horizons.

Are you searching to find yourself,  
seeking your place of belonging?

Yes, of course.

Recognize that you are also, increasingly, seeking the Christ.

And although he remains for the most part  
seemingly hidden, reticent and undisclosed  
you also sense that the Christ is seeking you,  
close and curious.

So the seeker is sought.

And whoever you are looking for  
is already here.

Close to you, curious.

### **A Kind of Tune**

A kind of tune, a music everywhere  
And nowhere. Love's long undersong,  
A trace in time, a grace note in the air,  
Borne to us from the place where we belong  
On every passing breeze and in the breath  
Of every creature. All things hear and fear,  
For faintly through our fall, we too may hear  
The strong song of the Son that undoes  
Death.

And one day we will hear it unimpaired:

The joy of all the sorrowful, the song  
Of all the saints who cry "how long",  
The hidden hope of all who have despaired.

He sang it to his mother in the womb

And now it echoes from the empty tomb. (from After Prayer: New sonnets and other poems)