

Easter Sunday – 9am Wesley – 5<sup>th</sup> April 2015

Reading: John 20:1-18

Text: “Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’  
vs 18a

### Introduction

I love John’s account of the resurrection because it is not male centric as are the other Gospels. Mary Magdalene is ‘front and centre’ and her struggles with what has happened to Jesus are ‘worked through’ as she finds the tomb empty, tells the disciples, goes back and encounters angels and then Jesus, but initially doesn’t recognise him and thinks he is the gardener. But called by name she realises it is Jesus and cries out ‘Rabboni’ which means ‘my teacher’.

In the book ‘Preaching God’s Transforming Justice’ (Westminster Press – 2011 – page200) the author writes:

“When Mary sees the stone rolled away, she immediately returns to the community to warn them.”

Other writers suggest that she fears that Jesus’ body has been stolen. That someone, in one last act of indignity, has robbed the tomb of Jesus, taking the body. Grave robbery was a common problem back then; so big a problem as to provoke an imperial Roman edict against it. Mary hasn’t looked into the tomb, only noted that the stone was rolled away. She assumes initially the worst, which is grave robbery.

Peter, and the disciple Jesus loved (we presume John) have a running race to see who can get there first and they go in and see the various folded items of linen that had wrapped up the body of Jesus, which would have been done by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38-42) and possibly their servants, who are not mentioned. For these disciples it was not simply the empty tomb that led to belief but the various linen cloths that had bound Jesus which were lying folded along with the burial shroud. Certainly the disciples didn’t believe that Jesus’ body had been stolen because of the way the linen and shroud had obviously been left, folded, which robbers would not have left that way. Whether here the disciples believed that Jesus had risen from the dead is unsure – they simply went back to their homes leaving Mary to grieve at the tomb.

Reverting back to the book ‘Preaching God’s Transforming Justice’, the author, Randall Bailey, says:

“Mary returns to the tomb, looks in and sees angels. Were the angels there when the men looked? Did they miss the apparition? Mary stays and struggles to find out what has happened. Is this emblematic of the differences between male and female spirituality? As Peter and Paul tell the story in Acts 10 and 1 Corinthians 11, we see the suggestions of competitiveness and stressing the roles of males. The males in those passages do not manifest the communal care that Mary exhibits.

In Mary’s persistence, both with the angels and the resurrected Jesus (vv 13-17), she even moves Jesus, from referring to her with the term ‘gyne’ which is translated as ‘woman’, to calling her by name, ‘Mary’. Mary is then instructed by Jesus to ‘Go ..to my brothers...’ and tell them he has risen.”

Mary’s central, pivotal role in a male dominated society, shows that Jesus, even in and through the resurrection has an equal place for women in God’s kingdom. This aspect is lost through some of the later writings which is quite sad.

Also the fact that Mary struggles with her faith and what has happened to Jesus but perseveres through odd encounters is often overlooked in these accounts.

Understanding the resurrection is never easy as it goes against much of our rational thinking.

### Story

The other week I was given a copy of the following – it came with no acknowledgement as to who had written it, but in the light of the Resurrection, and the struggle we may have with this, I liked the analogy that this may be a bit of a parable for today.

The story goes like this:

“In a mother’s womb were two babies. One asked the other: ‘Do you believe in life after delivery?’ The other replied, ‘Why of course. There has to be something after delivery. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later.’

Nonsense’ said the first. ‘There is no life after delivery. What kind of life would that be?’

The second said, I don’t know, but there would be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat with our mouths. Maybe we will have other senses that we can’t understand now.’

The first replied, ‘That is absurd. Walking is impossible. And eating with our mouths? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord supplies nutrition and everything we need. Plus the umbilical cord is so short. Life after delivery is to be excluded.’

The second insisted, ‘Well I think there is something and maybe it is different than it is here. Maybe we won’t need this physical cord anymore.’

The first replied, ‘Nonsense. And moreover if there is life, then why has no one ever come back from there? Delivery is the end of life, and in the after-delivery there is nothing but darkness and silence and oblivion. It takes us nowhere.’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ said the second, ‘but certainly we will meet Mother and she will take care of us.’

The first replied, ‘Mother? You actually believe in Mother? That’s laughable. If Mother exists then where is she now?’

The second said, ‘She is all around us. We are surrounded by her. We are of her. It is in her that we live. Without her this world would not and could not exist.’

Said the first, ‘Well I don’t see her, so it is only logical that she doesn’t exist.’

To which the second replied, ‘Sometimes, when you’re in silence and you focus and you really listen, you can perceive her presence, and you can hear her loving voice calling down from above.’”

### Conclusion

The story is obviously ‘tongue in cheek’ but there are interesting parallels as we think about the resurrection of Jesus.

There will always be those that reject it out of hand, those that continue to search for the risen Lord and those that encounter Jesus in one way or another and can say with Mary, ‘I have seen the Lord!’ in whatever way that may be.

May we be reminded today to look afresh at Mary of Magdala, her persistence in seeking Jesus, her care for the community in mourning and her preparedness simply to stay with her grief and to work it through. Into that scenario Jesus enters.

May the risen Lord come to us, taking away any fears and offering us resurrection joy.

Amen.