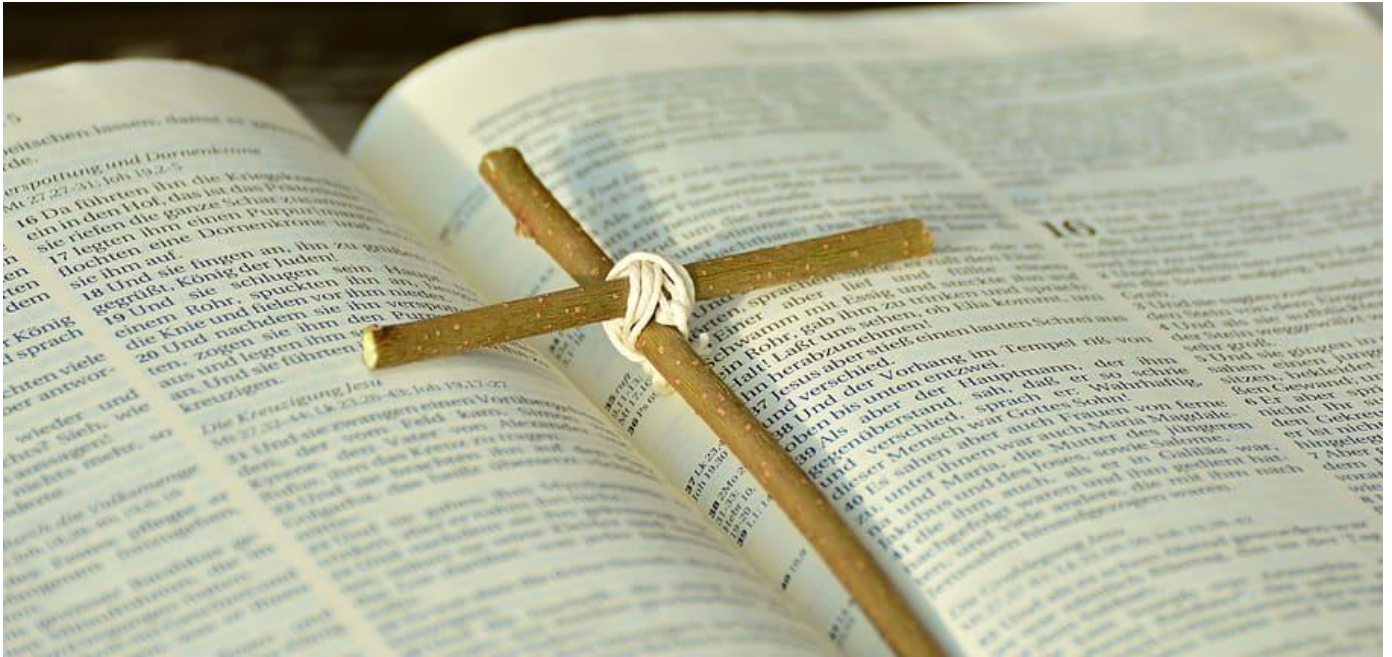


Reflections on the Easter Journey through the gaze of Mary



Magdalene.

2023 sermons from Maundy
Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter
Sunday



Alstonville
Anglicans



Maundy Thursday Liturgy

How did the rose ever open its heart and give to this world all of its beauty?

It felt the encouragement of light against its being—

otherwise, we all remain too frightened (Hafez).

“Slowly blooms the rose within”

I am the rose of Sharon,
I am the lily of the valley...
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth;
truly more pleasing is he than wine.
I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.

“Slowly blooms the rose within”

A garden enclosed, my sister bride;
a garden enclosed;
a fountain sealed... a garden fountain,
a well of fresh water, flowing from Lebanon.
Arise, north wind,
and come, south wind!
Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow.
I have come to my garden, my sister, bride,
I gather my myrrh with my spices.

“Slowly blooms the rose within”

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where he had raised Lazarus the dead man to life. Now Martha waited on them. Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus.

Then Mary took a pound of costly perfume with genuine nard and anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair. And the whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

“Slowly blooms the rose within”

Place me as a seal upon your heart,
For love is as strong as death,
its ardor as unyielding as the grave.
It burns like a blazing fire,
Like a mighty flame.
Many waters cannot quench love.
Rivers cannot wash it away.

“Place me as a seal upon your heart, For love is as strong as death.”

Then Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, the disciple who would betray Jesus, remarked, "This perfume could have been sold for over three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor."

But Jesus rebuked him saying, "Leave her alone. Was she not keeping it for the day of my burial? Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed all over the world, what she has done will be told in praise of her."

It was now just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

"Place me as a Seal Upon your Heart"

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist.

⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷ Jesus replied, 'You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸ 'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.' ⁹ 'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!' ¹⁰ Jesus answered, 'Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.' ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. ¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. ¹³ 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

"Place me as a seal upon your heart, For love is as strong as death."

³⁴ 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

"Slowly Blooms the Rose Within"

How did the rose ever open its heart and to this world all of its beauty?

It felt the encouragement of light against its being—
otherwise, we all remain too frightened.



Maundy Thursday Sermon

Desiree remarked on that Holy Week is one liturgy; and when you truly engage in it, something out of this world may happen. Awesome in fact.

Now, today, *this* Maundy Thursday in particular, we have a liturgy that reflects an appreciation of Mary Magdalene and her relationship with Jesus, that is culled, *inter alia*, from The Gospel of Mary Magdalene as well as the Gospel of John. In case you missed the allusion, that was Mary Magdalene reciting the passages from the Song of Songs to her heart's desire.

The brain constantly strives to integrate what we learn in the present with what we know from the past.

I have come to think of that process as akin to solving a jigsaw puzzle. We look for corners and edges, gradually fit them together to form a frame, within which clusters of pieces form and coalesce. Gradually, a picture forms. The end point, the completed picture, is poles apart from the bits and pieces of the beginning.

Think of the jigsaw pieces as fragments of memory and fragments of new information, and we have a metaphor for how we piece together a coherent, seamless, narrative of understanding; but then a new piece of information arrives, and the process repeats. Our memory systems are plastic, with a marked proclivity for development and change.

So, I say this advisedly: I vividly remember a Holy Week in Canberra that came alive for me. The concentration of readings throughout the week begot fresh understanding; but the cream on the cake was performing the Messiah. The scripture texts in the Messiah are strung together like jewels on a necklace which, together with the music, took me into another world. Initially, my imagination was in full flight, until my mind eventually immersed itself in awed silence.

Hear some of Mary Magdalene's words:

"I left the world with the aid of another world;
A design was erased,
By virtue of a higher design.
Henceforth I travel toward Repose,
Where time rests in the Eternity of time;
I go now into Silence."
Having said all this, Mary became silent,
for it was in silence that the Teacher spoke to her.'ⁱ

The vision that came to me on that memorable Maundy Thursday gradually morphed into a deep silence that seemed to be a different way of knowing, seemingly a different plane of existence.

Cynthia Bourgeault would have said that it was ‘an actual *realm*, a realm that is subtler and more endowed with *real* Being than our own realm; the place or origin from which what we call “reality” is merely a shadow projected into the space and time of our earthly surroundings.’ⁱⁱ

This kind of visionary knowing was rejected by the Western Church in the 3rd and 4th centuries, only to resurface many centuries later in the writings of Near Eastern Islamic mystics like Ibn Arabi, who named this realm “Imaginal.”

That term, Imaginal, does not mean imaginary, fictitious or subjective. It means a realm of existence in which the images – eternal prototypes if you will – reveal themselves as authentic, a realm neatly described by Jean-Yves Leloup as ‘that in-between zone where spirits become embodied and bodies become spiritualized.’ⁱⁱⁱ

Ancient traditions would have it that silence can be thought of as, a ‘transcendence in the heart of immanence.’^{iv} Ignatius of Antioch wrote that the World (Logos) comes from Silence and returns to Silence (symbolized by the Father). And, between the Silence of the Source and the Silence of the End, there is a time for word (logos) and breath (pneuma), when human beings are graced and blessed with the potential to participate in and to understand, the life to which such Holy Mysteries beckon.^v

Clement of Alexandria wrote: ‘Silence, they say, is Mother of all beings born of the Abyss [a deplorable phrase]. Inasmuch as she has expressed the inexpressible, she has kept to silence. Inasmuch as she has understood, she named it; the incomprehensible’.

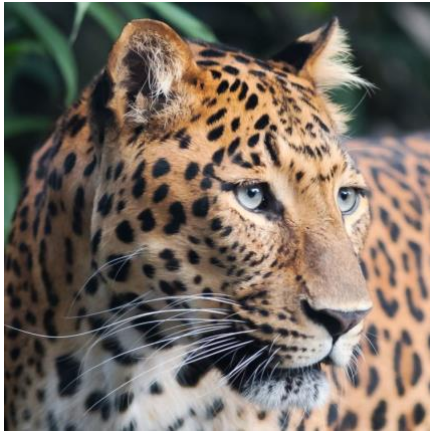
This was the apophatic tradition of the *early* Church Fathers, for whom God remained incomprehensible and inaccessible. In their view, human beings could only know names and qualities of God; could only know the Son and the Holy Spirit, but not the inaccessible Essence.

Leloup put it this way: ‘We can only know the radiation of the sun, never its heart, where light is most dense and always hidden from us. Both physicists and mystics speak of the darkness at the core of light. Of course, these are only analogies, yet their message is that in the physical domain, as in the spiritual, the Essential always eludes our minds. We can only come to it through silence and repose.’^{vi}

This is difficult and heady stuff for those of us who were brought up within a cocoon of ossified Christian doctrine that lacks the substance of Wisdom teachings. But it makes sense, does it not, of Jesus’ bidding, ‘Whoever has ears, let them hear.’ (Matthew 11.15) It would seem that, of all the disciples, Mary Magdalene developed ears that hear. So can we.

So, as Jesus said to them, “Rise, let us be on our way.” (John 14.31)

Doug Bannerman © 2023



Gaze: A message for Good Friday based on John 19

In the gaze of a Leopard

On a previous visit “back home” to South Africa, we spent time in the Kruger National Park. On a particular game drive, our path was blocked by a convergence of cars converging on the roadside. These visitors excitedly explained that there was a leopard and that was why everyone had stopped.

We rolled down the window and adjusting the binoculars we could see a patch of grass in the distance, about the size of a ten cent piece, with a lot of imagination it could possibly have been a leopard. We soon gave up and drove home. We had only travelled about two kilometres when we had to brake suddenly for a leopard that sauntered, no, swaggered, across the road. We were the only ones in sight. The leopard locked eyes with me. It was perhaps only minutes, but it felt like an eternity. The leopard held my gaze, time stood still. It was as if this leopard was looking directly into my soul. I was awed by its primordial energy, vibrant with raw inner life, its life-source was so radiantly luminescent it made my heart beat much faster. It was as if each of its spots glowed with its own inner fire. I will never forget my moment in the gaze of that animal. It was a visceral, felt experience of ultimate self-hood. It is highly likely that the leopard was only contemplating me as a possible meal on its menu for the day. But its life force was so palpable through its gaze, I felt so fully present, so in touch with my own inner fire. I still get goosebumps to this day thinking of the gaze of that animal.

In the gaze of Marina Abramović The artist is present.

The memory of being in the gaze of that leopard is enhanced by the performance art of Marina Abramović In 2010, at MoMA, (Museum of Modern Art) Abramović performed an extensive piece called "The Artist Is Present". The art piece took place in the atrium of the New York MoMa. Instructions on the floor read: "Sit silently with the artist for a duration of your choosing". ("Marina Abramović, The Artist is Present - Smart history") During the piece, she sat silently at a wooden table opposite an empty chair. Some days, she was dressed in a flowing red dress. Individuals took turns sitting in the chair and gazing at her while she gazed at them. For almost three months, eight hours a day, she embraced more than 1000 strangers with her gaze, many were moved to tears. Abramović was surprised by the immense interest in the piece and the human desire for contact, as there were constant lines of people waiting to participate. "Nobody could imagine...that anybody would take time to sit and just engage in mutual gaze with me," Abramović explained. In fact, the chair was always occupied, and there were continuous lines of people waiting to sit in it. "It was [a] complete surprise...this enormous need of humans to actually have contact." (Marina Abramović, quoted in "Marina Abramović: Early Years," Marina Abramović Institute, <http://www.mai-hudson.org/about-mai/>.)

The event, presented as a work of pure art, had an electrifying effect on the public. A benign group frenzy gradually took hold, and many individuals were moved to tears while adopting a hand-on-heart posture in Abramović's presence. Furthermore, the event had a profound message: in our daily lives, we seldom gaze intently and for a prolonged duration into another person's face, which is the enigmatic, fundamental source of personality and identity. Even the most passionate of lovers may lose the habit after a month or so.

In the gaze of Mary Magdalene: The crucifixion

I would like you to take this information into the scene described in John 19, the crucifixion:

“Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”

I repeat:

“Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”

Remember this text, for it is important information for you to answer a question that I will ask of you later. Let us be perfectly clear about the scene. Which disciples were at the cross of Jesus? Peter? Andrew? James? Lazarus? What about John? Was John there? No. None of the male disciples of Jesus were there. None of them. All the testimonies we have assert that the male followers of Jesus fled the scene. The Gospel of Matthew states that when Jesus was arrested, "all the disciples left him and fled" (Matthew 26:56). Similarly, in the Gospel of Mark, "they all left him and fled" (Mark 14:50). In the Gospel of John, it is mentioned that "all his disciples deserted him and fled" (John 18:1-11). We will not assert blame or apportion guilt for this. If the male disciples had not fled, we might not have our faith. Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate for treason. Anyone associated with Jesus was vulnerable to the same. Since women were nonpersons they could be alongside Jesus with less fear of reprisal.

All four gospels claim that while all the other disciples are fleeing, Mary Magdalene stands firm.

Mary does not run.

Mary does not lie about her friendship with Jesus.

Mary does not deny Jesus three times.

Mary witnesses.

Throughout his crucifixion, Jesus was held in the gaze of Mary. Says Cynthia^{vii}:

"Hers is clearly a demonstration of either the deepest human love or the highest spiritual understanding of what Jesus was teaching, perhaps both."

Why then do the Holy Week liturgies tell and re-tell the story of Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus, while the steady, untiring gaze of Magdalene is not even noticed?

What if, instead of emphasizing that Jesus died alone and rejected, we reinforced that one stood by him and did not leave?—for surely this other story is as deeply and truly there in the scripture as is the first.

How would this change the emotional timbre of the day? How would it affect our feelings about ourselves?

About the place of women in the church? **About the nature of redemptive love?**

I have always been taught that Jesus died alone, rejected, dejected. But no.

Love stands at the foot of the cross, gazing at the Beloved.

Love follows the small group of people that takes his body from the cross to the grave.

Love holds vigil.

Love anointed him before the Crucifixion and love is there to anoint him at the end of the Crucifixion.

Throughout the entire Paschal mystery Jesus is in the gaze of one who loves him.

Through the Great Easter Mysteries of 2023, our intention was to see the life, death, and Resurrection through the gaze of Mary.

Doug began this reflection on Maundy Thursday noting the link between Mary anointing the feet of Jesus in John 12 and Jesus anointing the feet of his disciples in John 13. That Mary was a disciple of Jesus that understood his message at a very deep level is clear when we note that her anointing frames the Paschal mystery. We see that Jesus’ passage is framed on either side by her parallel acts of anointing. At Bethany she

sends him forth to the cross wearing the unction of love. And on Easter morning he awakens to that same fragrance of love as she arrives at the tomb with her spices and perfumes, expecting to anoint his body for death. He has been held in love throughout his entire passage.

A new gaze at the Cross of Jesus

Our liturgy and tradition have emphasised that Jesus died alone, rejected. In the words of Handel's Messiah, Jesus was "despised. Despised and rejected. Rejected of men. A man of sorrows. A man of sorrows. And acquainted with grief. A man of sorrows. And acquainted with grief. He was despised. Rejected. He was despised. Despised and rejected of men. A man of sorrows. And acquainted with grief."

Studying the gaze of Mary we realise another truth about the Crucifixion; that Jesus was held in a gaze of love before his death in the anointing of his feet, throughout his death with Mary's presence at the cross, at the end of his suffering with her early morning visit to his tomb. What does all this mean? It means that the message of the cross is about redemptive love. The cross is about kenosis. Kenosis means self-emptying love, self-sacrificing love, self-surrendering love. Self-emptying love is the pouring forth of one's life force into another. When we remember Mary's place at the cross, it becomes impossible to experience the Paschal Mystery (the death and Resurrection of Jesus in any other way than redemptive love.

Jesus was not about proving that a body lives forever. Jesus' message was that spiritual identity constructed through kenotic self-surrender lives beyond the grave and can never be taken away. The sphere of the Paschal Mystery is not dying but dying-to-self. The paschal mystery functions as the prototype for all our personal experiences of dying and rising to new life in the journey of kenosis. This transformation reminds us that it is imperative to fall through fear into love because that is the only way we will ever truly know what it means to be alive. **This has the effect of sanctifying all our loves and lives. In every gaze of love that we offer we are continuing the story of redemptive love. We live the Good Friday story in self-emptying love, and this gives birth to the New Creation, which is where The Gospel of John leads us.**

The Gospel of John is about how redemptive love births the new creation. From the prologue to the conclusion John's Gospel echoes the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus. There are direct references to the creation myths from Genesis 1 and 2 in John 19. When Pilate shows the crowds Jesus after he has been tortured, he says "Behold the man" (John 19.5). This parallels the sixth day of creation when God created human beings in God's image. After Jesus dies a soldier pierces his side and "blood and water flows" (John 19.34) indicating the birth process of the new creation wrought by redemptive love.

The moment before he dies Jesus ensures that lovers of authentic love following the way of Christ will continue his legacy of co-creating the new creation: "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home." (John 19. 26&27). Who is the disciple whom Jesus loved? I hear some of you say John. But I remind you of our memory verse: "Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene." In other words, John was not there. The balance of probability lies in the fact that John, along with the other male disciples was **not** at the foot of the cross. The male disciples had fled the scene not only because of their fear of the Romans, but also their fear of the Jewish leaders. Indeed "the fear of the Jews" pervades the latter part of John's Gospel. To the best of our knowledge only the three Mary's were present. So, who then is the beloved disciple. There is much scholarly research into the question. Some scholars argue that

the beloved disciple is John, others say Andrew, still others insist that Thomas was the beloved. Well respected scholars have also argued convincingly that Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus and even Lazarus was the Beloved disciple. Based on the text itself many acknowledge Mary Magdalene as the beloved disciple.

What do I think? I suggest that the authors of our fourth Gospel, whoever they may be, have written the reader or the listener into the text. You and I, the hearers of these Gospel words, are the beloved disciple. I invite you to reread the Gospel with this in mind, noting all the moments that the writer draws you, the beloved disciple, into the text. Every time the writers explain the plot in parenthesis they tip their hat to the Beloved disciple who like the author is aware of what is about to happen.

If we are the beloved disciple and we each “take Mary home” and we are her “sons,” then we too are the Christs, called to reflect God’s image into the world. With every moment of authentic love of self-emptying and self-fulfilling love we are the glory of God, and the new creation breaks through. Like Christ we embody the new creation, the joining of heaven and earth through learning to love well. This is not some unreachable, divine task; it is the normal way we were created to be. The cross as a symbol of redemptive love **means that we are now set free to be genuine humans.**

Desiree Snyman 2023



Easter Message based on Matthew 28

Easter dates

What is the date for Easter next year? Does anybody know? The Rules to calculate the date of Easter are from the algorithm taken from the 1662 book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, as revised in 1953 (there was a transition from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1752). Specifically it says: To find the Golden Number, or Prime, add One to the Year of our Lord, and then divide by 19; the Remainder, if any, is the Golden Number; but if nothing remaineth, then 19 is the Golden Number. To find the Dominical or Sunday Letter, according to the Calendar, until the year 2099 inclusive, add to the Year of our Lord its Fourth Part, omitting fractions, and also the number 6: Divide the Sum by 7; and if there is no Remainder then A is the Sunday Letter: But if any Number remaineth, then the Letter standing against that Number in the small, annexed table is the Sunday Letter. For the following Century, that is from the Year 2100 until the Year 2199 inclusive, add to the current Year its Fourth Part, and also the number 5, and then divide by 7, and proceed as in the last Rule.

Why does the date for Easter change each year? The Easter mysteries are celebrated in conjunction with the full moon and the seasons.

Thoughts on Easter

The date for Easter is always on the First full moon after the solstice. Our faith ancestors had this instinct that Easter wasn't just something to say in the Creed. The fundamental instinct is that Easter has something to do with every aspect of creation itself. Even if we didn't have the person of Jesus, even if we didn't have the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, there would still be this paschal mystery of dying and rising. The paschal mystery or the death and resurrection of Jesus is simply the belief that out of death comes life. We know ourselves that if we cling too tightly to life, the less life we have. We know that it is in our ability to surrender, in our ability to pour ourselves into others, where a true and full life is experienced. The resurrection

is more than a theological event. That's the point. Resurrection affects the entire cosmos. Even if we didn't have the Easter story, I'm still convinced that we would have this instinct of the Paschal mystery that out of death comes life.

The Easter story is written into the very fabric of evolution. The example I gave two years ago was about a butterfly emerging from the soup of a dissolved caterpillar. The entire caterpillar melts away. The platelets floating on the liquified death of a caterpillar unite to create something new – a butterfly. The caterpillar dies and then out of death comes life. If caterpillar soup is not to your taste, there is the example of seeds.

When one looks at a seed, one cannot imagine what type of tree the seed might be. When that seed surrenders to the earth in death, new life is born. Let us imagine the trauma of death and the joy of resurrection from the perspective of a seed. The outer shell breaks open. Cold water and mud seeps in and the seed's body becomes mushy. The seed gives itself over to the soil although it is dark, and it cannot see the future. The seed follows its natural instinct to trust, to grow. As it surrenders to this process, as it gives up the life it once knew in the safety of the seed shell, it becomes something totally different, something that no one could ever have imagined just looking at that seed. A stem forms and grows into a tree and in some cases a huge tree and that tree continues to give more life in the form of food and shelter. The theme of death and Resurrection, that in the mystery of death is the birthplace of new life, is written into the very DNA of Creation as much as it is written into the Scriptures. We turn now to the Scriptures to further celebrate the paschal mystery.

Thoughts on the Easter scriptures

Matthew's Greek is ordinary but his artistry in weaving his Gospel perspective is beautiful. The resurrection account begins with an earthquake. The earthquake links the resurrection with the crucifixion since at the moment of crucifixion "The earth shook, and the rocks were split" (Matthew 27:55). "The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised." (Matthew 27:52-53). The earthquake is a literary feature that emphasises that creation also participates in the Resurrection. The earthquake links the crucifixion and the resurrection and highlights the presence of the two Mary's at both of these moments.

In Matthew's early chapters we have angels announcing the birth of Jesus. Now in the final chapters that very same angel is announcing Resurrection. The important message is that the Resurrection of Jesus is the birth of this new reality, the new creation that's available right now in the present.

Another aspect of the Resurrection account that draws attention is when Mary takes hold of Jesus' feet. There is a contrast for us to consider. The word that is used is arrest. Mary arrests Jesus. This contrasts what happens in the garden of Gethsemane. In Gethsemane Jesus is arrested by the powers and crucified. Here in Matthew 28 he is arrested by Mary and worshiped.

When the angel appeared, the Roman soldiers were frightened and fell down: "For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men". Matthew's irony comes close to sarcasm. Jesus who is supposed to be dead is alive (raised up). The Roman soldiers who are apparently alive are actually dead. Matthew is saying something about the values of society. The values of society that we think of as real are actually dead (e.g. independence, making it to the top, greed, putting oneself first). The values that Jesus emphasizes, vulnerability, gentleness, kindness, leastness, lostness, depending on others, empathy, are the values that are truly alive.

The description of the angel links the resurrection scene in Matthew 28 to the transfiguration in Matthew 17. In the transfiguration three disciples, Peter, James, and John were overshadowed by a bright cloud. Exactly like the Roman soldiers they too were overcome with fear. However, the difference is that the disciples were "raised up" by Jesus, a prefiguration of the resurrection. Jesus utters "Do not be afraid." The same words are used at the resurrection as at the transfiguration.

Some have said that the transfiguration wasn't so much the transfiguration of Jesus but really the transfiguration of the disciples. It was they who were transfigured. They had undergone some kind of transformation. Jesus takes the disciples up the mountain, a symbol of being close to God. Jesus was probably training them in some type of meditation technique. They've spent about three days in meditation, and this has broken down their ego boundaries. They are able to dip into that other realm which I promise you is there. Some call it mysticism. If we had eyes we could see it. The disciples have stepped into that other realm and experienced the transfiguration for themselves. I can promise you, hand on my heart, that every single one of you have stepped into that other realm too. I see it happen to people at the deathbed of a loved one. It's as if the curtain parts and that other realm comes forward. I hear about it from people who really connect well to creation - they feel that time stands still in a moment of total connection with creation all around them.

The point being made is that when we look at the resurrection, it's a mirror episode for the transfiguration. In the same way that the male disciples were transfigured, the female disciples experiencing the resurrection for themselves.

Thoughts on Mary Magdalene

What happens when we gaze at the Paschal mysteries from the perspective of Mary? All of a sudden the theology becomes softer. When I look at the resurrection and stand in the perspective of Peter and Paul and the writer of Hebrews my experience of the resurrection is about the remission of sins, and the dying and rising with Christ. This theology is about atonement theories - how Christ was sacrificed because of my sin and your sin. I don't for one minute want to repudiate that at all. I'm not. I'm just asking that we look at the Resurrection from Mary Magdalene's point of view and expand our vision to contain perhaps another perspective. I wonder which scriptures Mary would turn to, to explain the resurrection? The writer of Hebrews and Paul and Peter turn to parts of the Torah to interpret the Resurrection. Mary turns to the Song of Songs.

Song of Songs is controversial. It's erotic and it speaks from the female perspective. This is Mary's perspective about the crucifixion and resurrection; she says "set me as a seal upon your heart; as a seal upon your arm. For love is as strong as death" (Songs 8.6). From Mary's perspective, the Paschal mystery is self-surrendering, self-sacrificing love. Jesus took a gamble. Jesus' wager was this: "Is love as strong as death?" Does dying bring new life? And the Resurrection answers "Yes it does!".

I get that the resurrection is about sacrifice. From Mary's perspective the resurrection is so much more; it is about self-emptying, self-surrendering, self-sacrificing love. Love is as strong as death is the story of the Cross and Resurrection. It is a vindication of self-emptying, self-sacrificing love. Do you know what that does? It sanctifies as a valid spiritual path every single one of our lives and loves.

Our classical spiritual teachings are beautiful precious gifts, but they come to us from monks, celibates, and mystics and hermits like Julian of Norwich. The classical spiritual teachings outline some ways of spiritual maturity; if we want to draw close to God the disciplines include meditation, fasting, service to others.

Mary highlights another spiritual path, in which moment-by-moment, day-by-day, we are living the mystery of the resurrection. The spiritual path according to Jesus through Mary's eyes is in the very authentic and simple act of loving another human being, of pouring forth your life into another. So, in every moment that we all authentically love our children for their sake not ours we are living the mystery of Resurrection love. In every moment we authentically love a partner or a friend we are pouring forth the energy of our life into theirs, in that moment we are living the resurrection. It doesn't matter what you love. You could love a garden, a pet flower, a pet. The object of love is not the point. The process of loving is. The moment in which you pour forth the energy of your love into another is what is important.

Thoughts on the future

I would like to end by saying that the resurrection is not some event that might happen in the remote future. In other words, our faith is not this nonsense about dying and going to heaven. Is that what you thought the Resurrection was? Because it's not. Nowhere in scripture does earth go towards heaven. Nowhere in Scripture do we die and go to heaven. It is the other way around. What happens in scripture is that Heaven comes down to us. We will say it in the "Our Father": May It Be on Earth as it is in heaven. In the final book of the Bible, Revelation, it doesn't talk about earth going up to heaven but about heaven coming down as a gift to earth. The point is the new creation, the kingdom of God, is precisely the marriage of divine and human and it happens in Jesus, and it comes towards us.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ anticipates the destiny of the cosmos—divine energy permeating the cosmos in the continual act of marriage between earth and heaven. The resurrection happens in the present moment, but it is a present moment bathed in future, a new relationship with God, a new creation, a new wholeness for the deepening of life, or as one writer said, the resurrection is "the invasion of the present by the power of what is yet to come" (Ilia Delio). What took place in Christ is intended for the whole cosmos: that union and transformation in the divine embrace of love! Delio also says, "The resurrection of Jesus undergirds the fact that life creates the universe, not the other way round. Every act of physical death is an act of new life in the universe. The resurrection of Jesus speaks to us of this new life." I agree with Ilia Delio. As I said in the beginning, death is the birthplace of life.

Resurrection is not in some remote or distant future, but it is the power of love to create life out of death, here and now, today, and tomorrow. Where there is authentic love, there is resurrection. Resurrection happens now, or it does not happen at all. It happens in us and around us, in persons and history, in nature and universe.

We are not God, but every single person is born out of the love of God, expresses this love in his/her unique personal form and has the capacity to be united with God. Because Jesus is the Christ, every human is already reconciled with every other human in the mystery of the divine so that Christ is more than Jesus alone; Christ is the whole reality bound in a union of love.

We who say "yes" to the dying and rising of Jesus Christ say "yes" to our lives as the stuff out of which the New Creation can emerge. We are the continuation of Christ in evolution and the direction of evolution depends on our choices and actions. We are to give ourselves to Christ and to his cause and values, which means not losing the world but finding it in its deepest relation to God. We are to surrender in self-emptying love.

Sources

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ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

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