

Reflection for Wednesday 22 July – Mary Magdalene

Collect for Mary Magdalene

Christ our healer,
beloved and remembered by women,
speak to the grief that makes us forget,
and the terror that makes us cling,
and give us back our name,
so that we may greet you clearly,
and proclaim your risen life. **Amen.**

Collect for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

O God,
you alone can order our unruly will and affections:
teach us to love what you command,
and to desire what you promise,
that, among the changes and chances of this world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

John 20.1-18

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. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

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 on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending 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.

Reflection

In the name of the risen Christ, Amen.

It is dark when Mary comes to Jesus’ tomb. Life is dark when we have lost someone we love. Our hearts are heavy, dark and cold, and it can be impossible to believe that there will ever be warmth or sunlight again.

Mary comes in the darkness of the early morning and the darkness of grief, wanting to be close to the man she has loved, who brought her light and hope, and whose loss has plunged her into darkness.

The darkness in which Mary comes to the tomb reminds us of the darkness that brooded over the face of the earth before God began the work of creation. It is the darkness of things not yet formed or begun. The darkness of uncreated chaos.

John’s Gospel begins with the wonderful words of the prologue that tell us;
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

Jesus, the Word incarnate was present in the darkness at the beginning of creation, when all things were brought into being through him. The Talmud teaches that days begin at sunset, with darkness, and move to light. The days of creation are numbered from evening to evening. All transformation begins in the night. You cannot predict what will happen in the darkness.

On Easter morning Jesus is present with Mary in the darkness of her grief; present and filled with resurrection light that makes all things new. But she doesn’t recognise the significance of angels in an empty tomb, doesn’t recognise the face of her risen Lord.

Mary is still in darkness; her transformation is still taking place. John tells us of her inconsolable weeping. Her grief and the darkness of the early morning distort her vision and she cannot see that it is Jesus standing before her. Even when he first speaks to her she does not recognise him.

In the first story of creation, it is the voice of God that brings things into being, naming them, giving them their identity and their role. Now, in this garden, Mary recognises Jesus' voice when he names her, calling her into new life and giving her a new identity and role. *Go to my brothers*, Jesus says, making Mary Apostle to the Apostles.

The extraordinary thing about light is that even the tiniest, weakest candle can overcome all the darkness in the world. Darkness cannot quench light. And so, the darkness in which Mary came to the tomb vanishes in front of the Light of the World. Mary's eyes are opened and she runs to the disciples to tell them, *I have seen the Lord*.

In many ways, we are living in dark days right now. Sometimes our eyes can be blinded by our tears, or by the darkness of the world. But even when we are in the darkness, when it is too dark for us to see, if we listen, we will hear the voice of our risen Saviour calling us by name, giving us a new identity, calling us to be a new creation, calling us to open our eyes and see our risen Lord.

The Lord be with you.