

Mary Magdalene

22 7 12

Almighty God

whose Son restored Mary Magdalene

to health of mind and body

and called her to be a witness to his resurrection:

forgive our sins and heal us by your grace

that we may serve you in the power of his risen life.

Our text this morning is not from the Bible but from today's collect:

'called to be a witness to his resurrection'.

There are three Marys in the gospels who emerge as three dimensional characters in their own right : Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus; and Mary Magdalene – Mary from Magdala – from whom Jesus exorcised no less than seven demons.

Today, the 22nd July, is the day in our calendar when we remember Mary Magdalene. One thing we might remember about her sadly is not strictly true: that Mary Magdalene is the unnamed woman mentioned at the end of Luke chapter 7, a prostitute who, at the house of Simon the Pharisee, washes Jesus' feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, kisses them with her lips, then anoints them with a sweet-smelling ointment.

What is true of Mary is that she was with Jesus at his crucifixion, whether at the foot of the cross itself or standing a little way off. What is true is that Mary went alone or in the company of one or two other women to the tomb where Jesus had been laid to rest early on the Sunday morning. And it is to that moment in time I want to turn to today.

John's account has Mary go there alone early in the morning while it's still dark. She finds the stone rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. She assumes someone has opened up the tomb and the body of Jesus has been snatched. She runs back to tell Peter and John who confirm that the tomb is empty. Distraught, distressed, in tears, Mary remains behind after the two have left. Bending over to look into what she thought was an empty tomb, she now sees two angels, young men in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been laid the Friday he'd died.

The angels break the silence of the tomb with a question: 'Woman why are you weeping?'

Through her tears and still in shock, Mary tells them: 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' The simple truth! Overwhelmed by grief, she does not ask them who they are or what they think they're doing there but turns to go away when she sees Jesus standing there. But she does not know it's him.

'Why not?' you could well ask. Well, it could be simply she's not expecting to see him alive again and standing there. It could be she's blinded by her tears. It

could be she is modestly averting her eyes so as not to look directly at a stranger. Whatever the reason, she just doesn't see the person standing there is the very person she's looking for !

The question the angels asked is repeated by this 'stranger': 'Woman why are you weeping ?'

Assuming him to be a gardener and hoping he might be able to tell her what she wants to know, she asks 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'

His one word reply opens her eyes to whom it really is who's here speaking to her. Jesus says to her 'Mary' and hearing her name on his lips, she knows it's him. Is it the way he says it – a cadence she's heard a thousand times before? Is it his tone of voice, the love and affection embodied in just two syllables ? Whatever the reason, she is now convinced that the man whose dead body she had been seeking is here speaking to her.

And she replies with one word 'Rabbouni', teacher, acknowledging that she knows it's him.

Sometimes words can sometimes be inadequate; sometimes gestures more eloquent, more expressive of what we want to say. So Mary throws her arms around the man she loves and hugs him to her in her joy at finding him alive when she knew he was dead and lost to her.

But Jesus gently but firmly unentangles her enfolding arms then tells her what she must do. '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." '

And she does and so becomes the first witness to the resurrection. The apostles were called to witness to the truth of the resurrection. And one of our duties or responsibilities as Christians is to witness to our belief in the resurrection and the life of the world to come. Mary Magdalene knew first hand what we take on trust. She was 'called to be a witness to his resurrection' and that is our vocation too.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

22nd July, 2012

H: Sermon 26 : Mary Magdalene

