
WORD MADE FLESH

Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34, 36-43, Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Cor.5:6-8, John 20:1-18

Mary of Magdala, the Second Eve*

On Easter morn we come, like Mary Magdalene, to the garden, the garden of Christ's burial. It echoes of the garden lost so long ago, when we, as Eve, in self-forgetfulness ushered in estrangement and death to the garden of communion. In Mary of Magdala we see Eve again. In the garden of Christ's burial, Eden echoes. We come to the garden this morn, in grief for the estrangement and death that has, yet again, slain life. We come in the first shadows of the morning.

"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb...." And we come too, if Easter is in us, come, in the dark, to the tomb. Like Mary of Magdala we linger in grief after the disciples have returned home with who knows what explanations. We are fixed in this place till finally we look into the emptiness of the tomb. The linens are there; the shroud which covers the body of him who had taken on death is folded, strangely neat.

Where the body of the anointed life had been, two angels sit. It is those two bearers of light that ask Mary, who ask you and me, "why are you weeping?" Nothing more. Nothing profound. Nothing promising. Only the grace-bearing question, "why are you weeping?" "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Poets and men and women in agony have sung it or wailed it since the loss in that other garden so long ago, time out of mind. "I have lost my love, I have lost my self, I have lost my life."

This is the place of Easter morn.

And only then does Mary of Magdala, you and I, turn around to face the garden.

There, as is so often the case in life, a stranger asks a little more than the angels, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" And we hear, however dimly, the echo of that question so long ago in Eden, in the innocence of our first light, the echo of that question which invited the human nature to forget it was already created in the "image and likeness of God." The temptation was and is a fiction of the evil one. And we, like Adam and Eve, usher in estrangement and death when we do not hear our name but some utopian dream in the tempter's question.

Mary of Magdala, "supposing him to be the gardener" pleads with him. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." "Jesus simply called her name, "Mary." "Mary." Nothing more. Nothing profound. Nothing promising. Simply called by name.

Echoes here, too. And God walked in the garden in the cool of the evening and called to Adam and Eve. In the depth of self-forgetfulness, hearing one's name brings shame, estrangement, banishment, death.

But here, this Easter morn, this time of *pascha*, this feast of freedom, this moment of remembering, Mary of Magdala hears her name and is freed from the bondage of death, the grief of lost life.

Eve (and you and I) came in the morning with her hands filled with the fruit of the tree of the knowledge; Eve came to know that she had snatched death from life in that morning of self-forgetfulness. Eve came, in that other garden where-in estrangement was born, to find herself naked and unable to recognize the wonder of her created being. Now, this Easter morn, the second Eve, Mary of Magdala (and you and I) comes to snatch life from a tomb, to find grace where there was only condemnation.

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