

Easter Day

Nothing could be clearer by the end of Good Friday, than that our business with the Son of God had reached a juddering halt. The participants in his drama have all gone to their homes, and the Passover lambs have been eaten, and there is a feeling of Sabbath; no-one can do anything, and no-one wants to do anything. It is the flattest Passover anyone can remember. Pilate is glad it's over, and Caiaphas, despite a few hairy moments about the nature of the charge written over that man's head, thinks he can live with his day's work. The disciples can't face themselves, and are pretty disgusted with one another, and Thomas has gone off by himself. There is nothing in the air but black disappointment, defeat, and maybe the feeling of embarrassment, wondering how they had ever got so excited about a wandering rabbi. They seem to have stuck together somehow, and the women, who are less vulnerable than the men where Roman soldiery and the high-priest's police force are concerned, have decided they will make good the skimmed burial they had to give him, what with the shops being closed and the need for hurry. Mary of Magdala can't sleep, and is at the tomb before first light, and she is the one who discovers that the new week is beginning even worse than the old one ended. A grave robbery. She is convulsed with anger and grief, and *she comes running* to Peter and the Beloved Disciple.

She had stayed close to the dying Jesus. She had accompanied him. She wanted to sit by the tomb and let his death sink in to her consciousness. Now she finds the tomb is no longer a tomb: and her first response is that someone has *taken him away* and *put him* somewhere else. The man she had loved and revered has become an object, and article to be robbed or hidden. Who are the perpetrators? "*They* have taken him out of the tomb, we don't know where *they* have put him." His victimhood seems to have become absolute: he is at the mercy of others.

The two disciples in turn *come running* to the tomb. The news is sensational, but the pair of them are still true to type: the Beloved Disciple gets there first - younger, and inspired with more love; but Peter is still the leader, and he is the one who must be the first to enter this sepulchre which will become the greatest goal of pilgrimage on earth. Nevertheless, when the other disciple follows him in, it is he, and not Peter, who understands what has happened: it is all in the disposition of the cloths. He is looking, not at the scene of a robbery, but at an unmade bed. Someone has risen from sleep. It needs no further spelling-out; it is instantaneous.

He saw, and he believed.

The two men leave the scene with their heads reeling. But Mary of Magdala remains. They will be the official witnesses who have gone to begin the story of disclosure and the birth of Christian faith. For her, there is nowhere to go, and she is that mysterious bride in the Song of Songs, who has lost her lover and is searching for him. This is how the faith has always been. There's the official Church, with its formularies and creeds. And there are the real people who are learning to believe, with their experience, their struggle for wholeness, and their tears.

What happens to Mary we will read on Tuesday. But for the moment let us thank God for all the experience we bring to the Easter mystery: above all for the sorrows and losses which have taught us the limits of our ability to make ourselves happy and to fulfil our own life. They are the qualities which fit us to celebrate the mystery of the Cross, and make us worthy of the joy of Easter. Worthy to hear Paul say: *You have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when he is revealed - and he is your life - you too will be revealed in all your glory with him.*