



31st March 2024

Holy Week 2024

We Are Ambassadors

Jesus said to [Mary], "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord;" and she told them that she had said these things to her. (John 20:17-18).

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:16-20).

Through the days of her grief, Mary Magdalene is steadfast, faithful. The men run away from the Cross, all but John. She stays nearby. She is with Jesus at his burial. She goes home and *rests on the sabbath*, but the Lord remains very much in her heart. She remembers her healing, all he did for her, and all that she did for him, her care and support. Exhausted by the end of the day, she falls asleep, for a few hours. She wakes in the dark, and finds only his absence.

Why she comes to the tomb alone and so early on Sunday morning, is a mystery only to those who have never mourned. She wants to be near him. The power of love is such that it consecrates the places where our beloved still is, or has been. It may be a grave, or the bedroom of a lost child, or somewhere in our memory, calling us to visit. Love turns such places into their own country, borderless, beyond space and time. And when we visit, either with flowers in our hand, or in reverie, we find we are citizens of that place, close to our beloved once again. The hours flick by. We do not want to leave.

Mary is hopeful that she might recover that country by the tomb of Jesus, and by being as close to her Lord as she can be, perhaps extend her sabbath. What she finds instead is shock and terror, the tomb pried open, the body gone.

She immediately runs to the men, who have power that she does not. Surely they can sort this, raise the alarm, wake the authorities, find the thief. They run to the tomb, make notes, wring their hands, and go home. Her country is lost. For the first time all morning, she breaks down and weeps.

Then, through her tears, she sees the risen Jesus. She is not sure who he is until he speaks her name. Instantly she reaches out to hold him, to bring him back into her life. She will re-create the sacred land, and she will never leave it again.

But the Lord has news for her. That country is gone, because death is gone. She cannot bring him back into her life, for the simple reason that he has brought her into his life, the life of the Resurrection. There is now a new country, a *new creation*, immortal and eternal, under the love

of the Father. His friends are all citizens, and she the first ambassador. *So, go tell the brethren*, he commands her. And she does.

I have seen the Lord. When she announces this to the men, she keeps it simple, but its implications are clear. They are all forgiven: their cowardice, denial, vacillation, hand-wringing, willful incomprehension, and a host of other sins, along with hers, have all been dissolved in the blood of the Cross. Their fantasies of a different world made by their own hands have been obliterated by the new country, the new world brought into being by the Resurrection of Christ. They now become, with her, *ambassadors of reconciliation*. The Lord will visit them himself that same day, breathe the Holy Spirit into them, and say this explicitly: *As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven.* But they will have been prepared by the voice of Mary Magdalene, apostle of the apostles.

After the song and the feasting of this day, the flowers and chocolate eggs, and precious time with those we love, pray that we will still hear Mary's voice. Pray that we will take up the invitation Christ makes through her: that we be reconciled to one another, and so become with her true ambassadors of Christ's peace to our families and friends, to those who trouble us, to those in desperate need of grace whom we do not yet know, but will know if we let God guide us to them. That will be Easter glory indeed.

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.