

NORTH BALWYN UNITING CHURCH

EASTER DAY

SUNDAY 24 APRIL 2011

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“Where will I find him?”

The story about the resurrection in the gospel of John is very different from the accounts we find in the other gospels. So different in fact that they are hardly reconcilable.

The story as John tells it involves two men and one woman for instance, where the others all, consistently talk about 3 women and perhaps one man.

At the centre of the story in John is Mary Magdalene, the others have a rather indistinct group of women coming down to visit the grave on Easter morning.

According to Luke chapter 8, seven devils were exorcised out of her by Jesus. Some assume she is the woman who anoints Jesus in Matthew, Mark and John just before he dies, but no name is mentioned there. And in all gospels she is mentioned as one of the women who are watching Jesus die on the cross from afar. But that is really all we know about her.

Was she a mentally disturbed woman who latched on to a man who has proven he can give her peace from the demons that trouble her? Or is it true that they became lovers after Jesus healed her and brought out the lovely beautiful woman she was, out of its damaged and disturbed shell, like Dan Browne suggested in his book the *DaVinci Code* a few years ago? Was she one of the prominent leaders of the young Church, written out of its history in the 2nd or 3rd centuries that followed by men who favoured the male, hierarchical dominated governance of the Church?

She is an intriguing figure, and it would be interesting to explore her history and the theories that have sprung up around her over the centuries a bit more. And we may do that in a bible study session some time in the future. Our interest this morning however, is not with the theory behind Mary Magdalene, but with her experience and what there is to glean from it for us, who read her story 20 centuries later.

Early in the morning, before dark, Mary is on her way. Not with two others, as in the other gospels, but alone. Not to embalm the body, not worrying about the stone and how it might be rolled away, but totally and completely convinced and accepting that her master is dead and has given his last.

She walks to the tomb. No particular reason given. No particular activity in mind.

She is confronted with an open grave with the stone removed from its entrance.

Immediately she turns around and goes to get men. Simon Peter, who was one of the leaders, and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved and whom most scholars believe to have been John. Between those two men two races ensue: who gets to the tomb first and then about who believes first.

Then they go home.

And although one of them “sees and believes” neither of them seems to really get it. As it says: “For

as yet they did not understand the scripture”.

But Mary stays behind, stands weeping outside the tomb..... The men haven't really been able to help her..... I seems she needs to make her own connections.

She bends over and looks in the tomb and sees two angels sitting there. When they ask her what the matter is, the only thing she can say is: “They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him...” She is so stuck in her grief that even the sight of two angels can't shock her out of it. Gone, empty, no Jesus, no Lord, nothing, the total misery of the death of someone who is important to her, whom she really can't do without, whom she really doesn't want to be without.

There is no trace of hope, or a straw to grasp at. Dead is dead, empty is empty, and her numb mind is not able to move beyond those simple facts.

She turns away from the angels. Indicating that she doesn't expect more help from them than what the two men, those two important leaders of the early Church had to offer her.

I don't know if you have ever seen someone who was literally grief stricken. But I think that is exactly what she was. So grief stricken she can't think, she can't see, she can't feel anything but the dark depth of despair.

There is someone else appearing within her field of vision. Again that question: Why are you weeping? Who are you looking for? And again the answer: Tell me where he is - indicating she is looking for a dead Jesus, a body to grieve over, a place where she can at least be close to his outer shell while she mourns the loss of his living presence.

And then, after all that, 15 verses of back and forth, to and fro, only one word breaks the spell of despair and lifts the veil of darkness.

“Mary”

She turns and her eyes are suddenly wide open: Rabbouni!

Perhaps the *DaVinci code* was right, perhaps they were lovers. His that one voice you'd recognise anywhere. The voice that makes your heart flutter and your body tingle. The diminutive pet name that comes out without a second's thought and that intense desire to touch, to hold, to be with this person and never let them go.

Or is it that the love Jesus lived out in God's name was of a quality and intensity that, in those who truly loved him, inspired those deep and physical reactions, even where, there was, perhaps, no romantic love involved? In another story we see Peter reacting in very much the same way to the voice of his master.

I think at this point the question has to be: Have you ever heard Jesus' voice in that way? In a way that made you turn around and changed what you believed to be true, what you saw as possible? In a way that changed the parameters under which you had been functioning? Lifted the veil and opened the door to a life new and different?

Mary's eyes are opened, not because she *sees* something, but because she *hears* something. And all she hears is Jesus' voice calling her name. That is all. Nothing more, nothing less.

She supposes Jesus to be the gardener. Jesus is standing right in front of her and she does not see him. Was it her tears? Her grief? Jesus' attire? The sun in her eyes? It doesn't really matter. Point is she can't see him until he calls her. She can't get out of her rut until he takes her out of her reverie of grief.

The answer to "where is he?" is right in front of you. There where you can only see him if you listen carefully for his voice. The voice of love, reaching out from beyond the grave.

That really is the story of the resurrection. Of the unimaginable happening: Of the shackles of death being shaken off by the voice of love. Of the deep despair of someone walking in the valley of death being broken by the light of life emanating from the face of God. Of the implacable reality of the tomb changed by the sound of the whisper of one's name in the early morning air.

Mary!

John!

Peter!

Turn around. See me in those you meet. Wipe the tears away, shake the darkness of death's dark vale off, open yourself to the sound of God's voice in Christ. Calling you to see that God's love is stronger than death, stronger than what people can or will do to each other. Forever calling out, forever entering into the lives of those who are prepared to hear his voice, hoping to change them, like he changed Mary that morning. To creatures of love, to creatures of joy, to creatures of amazed, exultant, unexpected news of his rising, his presence with us now. Amen.