

“Mary Magdalene – A Meditation”

The Rev. Drew Willard
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In 1981, I visited Israel over New Year’s week and the very first thing I remember –
as I stepped off the plane in Tel Aviv, was the smell of orange blossoms...
Perhaps here in Florida, you have experienced the smell of orange blossoms
or some other flowering plant in its season.

What was that like for you? How did that make you feel?
I also remember seeing an orchard of olive trees on a hillside outside of Jerusalem
and the purple haze of their budding branches.

There are different seasons and different experiences
of things to be felt, seen, or smelled.

Being someone who was raised in New Jersey,
I miss the seasonal changes of the Northeast.

There’s the sweet smell of autumn –
of wet fallen leaves as well as the smell of burning piles of leaves
which is especially poignant at the close of the year.

Of any place I have ever been,
spring-time in my hometown of Plainfield, NJ, is the most beautiful,
because of the sight and smell of flowers throughout the city.
On occasion, there would be a special day of perfect weather in the Spring,
not too cool and not yet hot, but with a rare kind of breeze
that we probably take for granted here in North Central Florida.
It should have a name like ‘balmy zephyr’ or ‘chinook’, if it were not so rare –
but when you experience such a breath of wind by how it feels and smells,
it transports you to another place as a kind of aromatherapy.

The women who came to the tomb of Jesus brought with them spices
to anoint the body of Jesus.
It was three days, but not quite 72 hours, when Jesus’ battered body
had been laid to rest in a borrowed tomb, sealed with a great stone,
and guarded by Roman soldiers.

Imagine...

Willard, p.2

You are among the women – including Mary Magdalene,
who get up early in the morning without the benefit of
an alarm clocks to get out of bed
or flashlight to find your things...

Most likely you were camping at the Mount of Olives
with others who came with Jesus from Galilee...

So you wash and get dressed...

You gather the oils and spices, water and cloths
which you prepared the day before...
and perhaps a pack with food and other things...

You meet the others and begin to walk to where the tomb is...

As you walk together, you talk about whether the guards
will push the heavy stone out of the way so that you can enter
the tomb to properly wash and anoint the body according to custom...
Or will they refuse... Or will they let you go ahead,
but offer no help in removing the stone?

As you approach, it is still dark, and though you call out to the guards,
there is no answer...

Someone lights a lamp and shows that the stone has been rolled away...

What do you think about this?

Mary Magdalene says it means that Jesus had risen from the dead,
so she runs to tell the disciples.

Do you go with her? Do you stay? Do you look inside?

What do you see?

What would it take for you to believe such a thing ?

What would it take for you to believe that a person
could be resurrected to full health after being 'clinically dead'
for almost three days?

What is important for you to believe about this story?

Why is it important to you?

When you are ready, open your eyes...

What did you experience in this meditation?

Amen

Inspired by John 19:25-30

NOW STANDING BESIDE THE CROSS OF JESUS
WAS HIS MOTHER, HIS AUNT MARY THE WIFE OF CLEOPAS,
AND MARY MAGDALENE.

THEN, JESUS SAW
HIS MOTHER AND THE DISCIPLE WHO WAS HIS BELOVED FRIEND,
STANDING TOGETHER.

HE SAID TO HIS MOTHER,
“LOOK AFTER THIS ONE AS YOUR OWN CHILD.”

AND THEN SAID TO THE DISCIPLE,
“LOOK AFTER THIS ONE AS YOUR OWN MOTHER.”

SO FROM THEN ON,
SHE TREATED THAT DISCIPLE AS HER OWN CHILD.

WITH THAT, JESUS KNEW THAT ALL WAS ACCOMPLISHED;
IN ORDER TO FULFILL THE SCRIPTURES, HE SAID,
“I THIRST!”

THEY HAD A JUG FULL OF SOUR WINE THERE
WHICH THEY SOAKED INTO A SPONGE
AND TIED TO A JAVELIN.

THEY BROUGHT IT UP TO HIS MOUTH;
AND WHEN HE HAD TAKEN THE WINE, JESUS SAID,
“IT IS DONE!”

AND HE BOWED HIS HEAD
AS HE RELEASED HIS SPIRIT.

Inspired by John 20:1-2a. 11-18

NOW ON WHAT WOULD BECOME THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH DAY,
MARY MAGDALENE CAME TO THE TOMB,
EARLY IN THE MORNING WHILE IT WAS STILL IN GLOOM.

WHEN SHE SAW THAT THE ROCK
HAD BEEN ROLLED AWAY FROM THE TOMB, SHE RAN...

[Verses 2b-12 about the “beloved disciple” – traditionally believed to be John,
are omitted for poetic/prophetic license.]

LATER, MARY WAS STANDING OUTSIDE,
IN FRONT OF THE TOMB, CRYING,
STILL WEeping, SHE KNELT DOWN BY THE GRAVESIDE...

AND SAW TWO ANGELIC BEINGS,
CLOAKED IN RADIANCE,
SEATED AT THE HEAD AND FOOT OF WHERE
JESUS’ BODY HAD BEEN!

AND THEY SAID TO HER,
“YOUNG WOMAN, YOUNG WOMAN,

WHY ARE YOU CRYING, WHY ARE YOU CRYING?"
SHE SAID TO THEM,
"BECAUSE MY LORD HAS BEEN TAKEN AWAY
AND I DO NOT KNOW WHERE HE HAS BEEN HIDDEN!"

SOMEONE WAS SPEAKING BEHIND HER;
SHE TURNED AND LOOKED.
IT WAS JESUS STANDING THERE,
BUT SHE DID NOT RECOGNIZE THAT IT WAS JESUS.
JESUS SAID TO HER,
"YOUNG WOMAN, WHY ARE YOU CRYING? WHOM DO YOU SEEK?"
SUPPOSING THAT HE WAS THE GROUNDSKEEPER,
SHE SAID TO HIM,
"SIR, IF YOU HAVE TAKEN HIM, TELL ME WHERE
YOU BURIED HIM AND I WILL CARE FOR HIM!"
HE SAID TO HER,
"OH, MARY!"
SHE WHIRLED AROUND AND SAID TO HIM,
"RABBOUNI!" – WHICH IN ARAMAIC MEANS,
"MY DEAR RABBI!"

JESUS SAID TO HER,
"OY! DON'T HOLD ME SO TIGHT!
I STILL MUST GO UP TO HEAVEN!
YOU HAD BETTER GO –
AND TELL MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS
THAT I AM GOING UP TO MY ABBA, MY FATHER,
MY HEAVENLY GUARDIAN AND YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN,
TO MY GOD AND YOUR GOD!"

MARY MAGDALENE WENT FORTH FROM THERE
TO PROCLAIM THIS TO THE APOSTLES:
"I FOUND THE LORD AND HE SPOKE WITH ME!"

[AND GOD IS STILL SPEAKING]