

***Do Not Cling to What Is,
Rather Let Journey Us into What Can Be***

If resurrection means resuscitation of a deceased body back into a world of time and space, it stretches credibility beyond any logic we know. Such logic would violate all we know about science and how the world operates.

Luke's gospel presents a resurrected Jesus that can walk and talk, eat, and even offer his own flesh for examination, but the apostle Paul moves away from any emphasis on a physical resuscitation of the body. Paul argues for transformation. Remember Handel's *Messiah*. "We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (I Cor. 15:51-52).

Today's reading from Colossians forcefully portrays what Paul intends, "If, then, you have been raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). When Paul writes that Christ "will never die again," he was asserting the obvious. Bodies that have been resuscitated to this world must eventually die again. Paul was clearly talking about something other than a body walking out of a grave.

It is an important insight into the original Easter experience to recognize that in the writings of Mark, the 1st gospel, there is no story of anyone seeing the resurrected Jesus. Luke, author of the 3rd gospel, is the one who transforms the risen Lord into a very corporeal

being. But when it comes to the end of the first century, John, author of the 4th gospel, rails against such literalism.

Hence we find ourselves today at the 20th chapter of John. In chapter 20 John features not one, but 4 resurrection stories, none of which focuses on a literal belief in a physical resuscitation of Jesus's body. As it so happens, the opening story is that of a woman alone at the tomb. Her name is Mary Magdalene. What is so ironic about John's inclusion of Mary Magdalene is that she does not even appear in John's Gospel until chapter 19 where she is seen standing at the foot of the cross. She was first mentioned in the 8th decade of the first century when Mark identified her as one of those standing by looking at the cross "from afar" (Mark 15:40). Luke, some 10 years after Matthew was written did a strange thing. He introduces her as a woman out of whom Jesus had cast seven demons (Luke 8:2).

Both Mark and Matthew related the story of Jesus's feet being anointed by a woman prior to his death (Mark 14:3-9; Matthew 26:6-13). Though she remains unnamed, her action is applauded as an everlasting gesture of love. But something very unique happens in John's presentation of Mary Magdalene. Whereas she was a bit player in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, in John's gospel she takes on a starring role.

John opens chapter 20 by portraying Mary Magdalene standing at the tomb of Jesus. She is alone and weeping. The stone has been removed. Having discovered this, Mary Magdalene conveys this to Peter and the disciples. But then John requires that Mary do something so hard

and so difficult. He requires that she look into the empty tomb one more time. And there is a part of me that finds that to be so unfair. And yet, God had something else in mind.

In the Hebrew language consonants, not vowels, were of primary importance. Within Magdalene we find m, g, d, l which lead us to the Hebrew word *migdal*. The word is used only twice in the Bible. Once in Genesis and once in the Book of Micah. Translated into English, it means "tower." A *migdal* is a tall, recognizable structure designed to give a shepherd a better view of the flocks. Mary Magdalene became an example of the "tall," "large, or "great." In the John's mind, Mary was just such a shepherd.

John's gospel is the only one where Mary's character is portrayed in any depth. She becomes the chief mourner; in fact, she is the sole mourner at the tomb of Jesus. Why? Because for John, Mary Magdalene is the primary female figure of the Jesus movement, not only with regard to the meaning of who Jesus is, but also with regard to the meaning of the resurrection.

On Easter Day Mary Magdalene becomes our "chief mourner in residence." She represents anyone who has suffered through loss, especially the loss of a loved one. But it is the tomb that holds her dreams and all of those of Jesus's followers on standby. The tomb becomes an ultimate barrier against all of the things for which Jesus stood. If the tomb wins, this means his love was finite, his forgiveness was finite, and his life was finite. It means that it is all over.

Finding the stone has been removed becomes for Mary Magdalene the opening of a door. A crack has appeared in the finality of finitude. Having reported to the disciples the news of the stone having been rolled away, she returns a second time, and looking into the tomb she stares into the face of death. She begins to see things she has never been able to see before – mystical figures and angels. Still bound by her own sense of loss, she turns and sees Jesus standing there, but she does not recognize him. Mistaking him for the gardener, she states, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him." Then the greatest miracle happens. Jesus calls her by name. The resurrection means that we don't have to have experienced Jesus firsthand for him to call us each by name.

Death has neither separated Mary, nor you or me from God. Our new identity, our new being all remain intact. As the experience of Mary Magdalene confirms, we are known; we are loved. But like with each and every mystical experience, something propels us to hold onto it. We want to enshrine the moment, do we not? But Jesus says, "Do not cling to me. I have not yet ascended to the Father, but I am ascending" (John 20:17). It is as if Jesus is saying, "I am in the process of being transformed," and so are you!

Beyond the defensive barriers of our survival-driven culture there is a new dimension of life waiting to be lived. "The life I live," says Jesus, "is the life of God. The love I share is the love of God. The being that I reveal is the being of God." We no longer have a need to cling to the past or to the symbols of a reality that was all

that we thought existed. There is a future, and our future is with God.

**Alleluia. Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.**