

Easter Sunday 2024

There's a delightful spontaneity in the depiction of first Mary of Magdala running to the disciples to tell them of the empty tomb and then of the disciples running to the tomb to check it out, only for the Beloved Disciple to run faster and get there first, to look but not go in. Peter, and presumably the other disciples, now arrive and Peter goes in – perhaps exercising his leadership role already but it's only the Beloved Disciple who is said to see and believe. Peter leads in one sense but the Beloved Disciple and arguably Mary of Magdala, lead in quite another sense, or rather have followed the lead of Jesus in quite another sense. In John's gospel the Beloved Disciple is just that, the one who is loved into love and knowledge more than any other disciple. That may seem a bit unfair- God has no favourites and so on – but love has to begin somewhere, has to be incarnated in the particular, has to show itself first in one particular person, in one particular place at one particular time. The Beloved Disciple is archetypal in this respect. We know very little of him otherwise but I wonder whether the example of Mary of Magdala can help us a little in this respect. Again we know very little of her except that seven devils were cast out of her and she is faithful to Christ both at the cross and here now at the tomb, and perhaps because of her previous sinful nature and her desire to anoint Christ's body after death she has traditionally been associated with the woman who in Luke's gospel anointed Christ's feet with tears and a perfumed ointment, a woman who knows how to love because she has been forgiven much. She is secure in her love of Christ because she knows he has loved her first. And I wonder whether it isn't this security in love which is the feature or mark that distinguishes both Mary of Magdala and the Beloved Disciple from Peter at this stage in his life. For he's not yet had the chance to recover his friendship, his ease with Christ, after betraying him so shortly before: *"I am not, I am not a friend or associate of this man. I do not know him."* He's waiting then for that particular moment of forgiveness, of love, which will convince him that he was in fact loved all along whatever he might think, and however he might act, otherwise. This particular time, this particular moment, will come for us all. And then we will know and understand, like Mary of Magdala and the Beloved Disciple, what it is to be loved and to love – to have that freedom of action to both receive and give, to anoint and be anointed. We're talking then about the security in Christ which gives us our freedom. We are loved into freedom, free to love. Anything less is not Christian.

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