

A functional response to the fact that Peter and John miss the angels sitting where Jesus was laid could be that these were two separate stories later interwoven; a more imaginative, but no less true, response could be that Mary Magdalene sees differently, that her passion for Jesus is met by a gift not yet, or simply not available to or not yet needed for Peter and John. A functional response to this might be that yes, this is all part of the final redactor's aim at presenting a series of responses to Jesus' death, which display the varying degrees of faith to be expected when human beings confront the mystery of the resurrection. A more imaginative response might be that conversion is unique to the individual, forever local to a particular time, person, and place, and cannot, indeed should not, be stereotyped or confined to a norm in any way, because not only do we differ in our degrees of faith but Jesus differs in his approach, in his wooing of each one of us. This matters on many levels, not least in our approach to one another, that bearing of Christ to one another, which can never meet a generalised norm: love then, not as a commodity to be traded to gain this or that, but as a fascinating and never-ending exploration of friendship, as two completely unique individuals meet. No one else sees Jesus in the way that Mary Magdalene does, and no one else is seen by Jesus and responded to in the way that God or Jesus does here. If we wish to tease out a generalisation from this unique episode, as the other readings encourage us to do, it is that the wild emotions of personal attachment are no barrier to faith, or better, to an encounter with Christ. Emotion doesn't earn us a right to a response but, if genuine, is not met with indifference by God, indeed, it may well be a sign that God is already at work within us.

What I have in mind is a recent expression of despair that the suffering of a neighbour evoked in a former nurse. She'd never seen such an agonising death, so where was God in this, why did her prayers go unanswered? God was present all right, in her response to the suffering of her neighbour. This is God present in our emotions, the gift of God we bear for and to one another. The gift Mary Magdalene bears for us.

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