

MARY MAGDALENE AFTER THE DEATH OF JESUS

A reimagining of the story told in John 20:11-18

For some time after the crucifixion Jesus' friends were overwhelmed by the darkness of despair. The one whose companionship had enabled them to walk tall, who had given them a sense of well being that overflowed in the warmth of kindness and encouragement was no longer there. The one who had lifted their spirits and enlightened their minds with a feast of wisdom and compassion, who had shared their times of pain and anxiety, hunger and sadness, had been snatched from them. Having known the richness of his friendship, the loss now of someone so precious seemed unbearably cruel.

As they wrestled with the chaos of their grief, unable to understand what had happened, thoughts so dark invaded their minds that they were almost afraid to voice them to each other. If the things Jesus had told them were true, then they were all infinitely precious in the sight of the Source of all life. But in that case how could this One Parent of All whom Jesus had taught them to call Abba, Father, have allowed the destruction of such a faithful, loving son? If the One that Jesus had loved so much had indeed let these terrible events happen, how could they ever trust again anything Jesus had told them? Did it mean that everything Jesus stood for had died with his death? Had he and they been mistaken in imagining that their lives were of any value? Were they merely foolish nobodies, hoodwinked into putting all their trust into what was ultimately nothing but a web of fantasy?

Mary was the first to see a glimmer of light: as she mourned Jesus she remembered him saying that a tomb could not imprison anyone. Perhaps, she thought, he had meant that death is not so much a parting as the moment of returning into the loving heart of the Source of Life itself. Wiping away her tears she said to Peter and John: 'We may not know where they laid him, but he told us himself that a tomb is not the end of everything. Surely, whatever he meant by this must be true for him too. Is it possible that even though he is no longer with us, everything he said and did remains and is just as true and real as it was when he was alive?' Without knowing why, she felt a great weight of grief beginning to roll away from her spirits.

Peter and John, consumed by their own grief, barely heard what she said. She was a woman, after all, even though Jesus had loved her so much. But presently John turned to Peter and said that he too recalled Jesus' words that grave clothes could not bind a man in death. While they were struggling with the implications of this, they began to listen more carefully to what Mary was saying.

'But if she is right,' Peter said to John at last, 'if death could not bind him and no tomb could imprison him, that means that wherever they laid him he is not there any more.'

'In which case,' said John slowly, 'perhaps she has spoken the truth, and he has passed right through death after all.'

The two men were gazing at each other as they tried to take this in. For Mary, however, it was not simply bewildering: the man she had loved more than anyone had been brutally killed for no just reason. Weeping fresh tears of longing, she slipped away by herself and returned to the place where she had last seen Jesus. As she stood there, seeking comfort in the words that he had spoken, the tiny flicker of truth she had perceived suddenly became a dazzling light: for if Jesus had not been destroyed by death, then even if she could not see him, he still lived! She looked around her, hearing as if for the first time the bleating of the lambs on the hillside and the busy insect life among the flowers that Jesus had loved so much. While she had been in mourning, spring had returned to the earth. The countryside was green; the sun warmed her back. It was as if the whole world was bathed in newly washed light.

'Oh, Mary!' she said aloud to herself, and in saying her own name she seemed to hear the voice of Jesus: 'Do not cling to the past. I am still present all around you. Both you and I are one with creation and with the Creating Source. I have returned to the earth from whence I came. I am hidden in the life of everything that lives, and I am revealed in the love of all those who nurture life.'

Then Mary ran back to Peter and John and the others.

'He has not left us!' she cried. 'His spirit is in every breath we take, the One Spirit we share that enfolds us every minute. We are still together with him in the presence of the One who loves us all! No life is ever lost.'