

**Easter Day: CCSY, 12 April 2009**  
*Isa 25:6-9; 1 Cor 15:1-11; Mark 16: 1-8*

*Through the eyes of Mary Magdalene*

The first day of the week, very early. A dome of bluish light over to the east of the city as the mother of James and Salome set out with me. A grizzly, unwanted task lay before us: one best performed before the sun could begin its baking work. We staggered out of the gates together under the mixed weight of sweet-smelling spices and the gall of grief. If you've ever lost someone, you'll know what it's like two or three days afterwards: the fuss has abated; life goes on for the living; but the pain burrows deeper – like a smouldering coal in your chest.

Scarcely a word was spoken between us, beyond what was necessary to find our way to the place where Joseph of Arimathea had directed us on Passover eve.

I don't really know how to describe what followed...Several accounts of these things are going about like wild-fire, as you'd expect – none of which capture what 'happened' : that's not what such stories are for; but they all say something about the experience we shared variously.

As mine is told today, the sun was just rising, spearing its rays over the top of his tomb. Suddenly alarmed we dropped our fragrant burdens to shield our eyes – was it open? Had someone taken him from us in death as well as life? Then a voice – whose? – forgive me: I feel I'm still catching my breath...

You see, we bolted from that place like startled goats, tripping and gasping, for I don't know how long. When we couldn't run any more we just stood and held each other, a single quivering mass of terror.

The voice wasn't him, but it had named him: 'the crucified one'. He is always to be the Crucified One. But something else had rattled around my head like a psalmist's refrain as we fled: 'Galilee' ... 'Galilee, return to Galilee, he is not here, he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him.' Galilee...where this all began; where I first saw him – or rather, he first saw me.

Why, having come to a stone-dead end, would we go back to the start? And what could we possibly tell the others? They'll think us mad! Galilee...the place of our call, with its Lake: that body of water around which he gave us our name, our identity – in calm or storm a fountain of grace: grace by which I am what I am, and – in his eyes, at least – acceptable, accepted. Could it be that in the story of my life, my journey with these unlikely kin to whom I had become bound by that watery calling rather than by blood, or class, or ethnicity – could it be that as I search that experience he will show himself anew to me, to us – call us again from death to life? And if so, should I be any less frightened?

I remember the story he told us about the man with two sons: how the younger brother who is cut off – which, in our culture, is to be dead – says, 'I will arise and go to my Father.' That story was about us. For we were dead, lost, cut off from ourselves and each other, cut off from the one he dared call 'Father', until he found us by the shores of Galilee, reconciled us, and brought us home.

As you know, or you wouldn't be here, we did return to where it all began. Together we searched the Scriptures – the Law, the Prophets, the Writings – and we began to re-receive, to re-claim our own complex and often painful story as a people, trying to make sense of that tradition alongside our baffling, ambiguous experience.

There we encountered again, afresh, the Holy One of Israel, blessed be He, who breathes over the first waters of creation, bringing order out of chaos, light from darkness; who – in the great tales of the patriarchs and matriarchs gives children to barren women – Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel; the God of our forebears who restores the fortunes of Joseph after he is given up for dead by his own brothers, and the inheritance of Naomi when her life had become a living death – our forebears who, destined for extinction under the rod of Pharaoh made that deadly, but death-defying journey through the Red Sea; whose nationhood was reduced to a skeleton by generations of exile in Babylon, until the prophet Ezekiel declares these dry, dead bones will yet live to enjoy the feast prepared by the maker and giver of all good things on that mountain of Isaiah's holy dreaming.

We began to see that these stories abound in our collective witness to the character of God's presence: Jonah is rescued from the belly of the great fish as though from the belly of Sheol itself; Daniel is saved from the lion's den; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednigo emerge from the fiery furnace praising the God who, as the Scriptures say, 'rescued [them] from Hades and saved [them] from the hands of death.' (Dan 3:88 LXX)

If, then, going back to Galilee to look for him, to wait for him, was madness, and surely it was, then the alternative was greater madness: for death to hold him was madness; for the giver of so much life to lie in the grave was madness.

And so we did, at length, begin to speak, to tell our stories, our story: the Crucified One, he who has died, is risen – not to stand over but to walk with us in all the Galilees of our experience; and to go before us in our journeying, drawing us forward to be, what by God's grace, we already are in him.

I guess that's what people of faith have been doing ever since Abraham: shape the story with their life; shape their life with the story. It's what you do, isn't it? For this is your story as much as mine, and you will find your own words and actions for its telling, and retelling; indeed you must.

They'll think you mad, of course, as they did us. But anything else is madness. For today Adam is restored and Eve consoled; today we are re-fashioned, as once, in another story, from another garden, but tended by the same gardener who first called to Adam and Eve, I was re-fashioned by a single word, 'Mary'.

Richard Treloar  
Christ Church South Yarra