

Who are you seeking?

Psalm 118:1-2;14-24; John 20:1-18

Jean Vanier, the founder of l'Arche, the movement that ministers to and with people with disability writesⁱ:

Early on the morning, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene goes to a tomb where they have laid the body of her beloved Jesus. Her heart is broken. In the words of the Song of Solomon:

I sought him whom my soul loves.

I sought him but found him not.

I called him but he gave no answers.ⁱⁱ

She wants to be the first to come and anoint the body. But who will take the stone away? And when she arrives at the tomb, what does she find?

The stone has been taken away! The body of Jesus has disappeared. Someone has stolen the body of her beloved! The tomb is empty, and so is her heart. She runs to Simon Peter and to the other disciple:

They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid

Him!ⁱⁱⁱ

Everybody seems to be running in the early morning light. Running out of fear? Running because they are confused? Running because Jesus has disappeared? But where was the body of Jesus?

The writer of John's gospel reveals in a delicate way the relationship between the two disciples:

The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bend down to look in and saw the linen wrapping lying there, but He did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him and went in to the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in and he saw and he believed, for as yet they had not understood scripture that He must rise from the dead.^{iv}

Peter, heavy with sadness and guilt, is confused and runs slowly. The other disciple, the 'beloved', seems less troubled. He had followed Jesus to the cross and so is more sprightly. But he is respectful and lets Peter go into the tomb first. Peter is still the leader, even though he has denied Jesus. Peter sees the cloth that had been over the head of Jesus, folded up in a corner. No thief would have stopped to fold this cloth! The other disciple, in a flash of insight, understands. Jesus is surely risen. Peter remains confused and blocked. He does not yet believe.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.^v

The disciples leave Mary alone with her grief. They do not understand her pain. They seem confused before a woman's tears. Unable to respond to her, they run home.

Mary, weeping, bends over to look in to the empty tomb. She sees a vision of angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying.

Woman, why are you weeping?

Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.^{vi}

She is so sure that Jesus is dead, really dead. Blinded by her tears and her depression, she is unable to question the meaning of these two angels. When she had said this, she turned around, and a man she did not recognise was standing there.

“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?”

Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”^{vii}

Jesus says to her quietly, “*Mary.*”

He calls her by her name, she who was wildly searching for His dead body. Yet it is Jesus Who finds her. There is such tenderness in His voice, such love. It is Jesus! He is alive! And at last Mary sees the One she had been seeking. Her tears of grief disappear under the passionate force of her love. She throws herself at His feet and clings to Him.

In amidst the alleluias of this day, and the continuous need for us to be thankful and hopeful, there is something so humble in the story of the resurrection that we miss it at our peril. The risen Jesus does not appear triumphant over the Temple to show His victory and to humiliate those who had humiliated Him. He appears to Mary, the loved one, the forgiven one, alone in a garden. Jesus shares a simple, heart-to-heart relationship with her, a “gentle moment of eternity.”^{viii} He does not appear with power but with gentle love. He does not want her to cling to Him, but to go back to the community, to those men who had abandoned Jesus, those men who did not know what to do with her tears. She had been seeking Jesus, and He had found her, and whether they believe her or not, she has to tell them what she has experienced.

Who are you seeking?

Mary might represent each one of us. Like her, we run here and there frantically, each one of us at times alone, feeling empty, weeping and wailing for a key to peace, seeking a dead body, seeking a Jesus Who lived some two thousand years ago. Then Jesus, Whom Mary seeks, finds her and calls her by name.

Might it not be, this Easter morning, we too are waiting to be found and called by our name – by Jesus?

Who are you seeking? Whatever you make of the complex, multi-layered stories of Easter, with their word images and their vivid writing and their great questions, at their heart is this questing figure of Jesus. Intangible in many ways, yet more real than anything we could ever imagine. The Jesus Who teaches and guides; the Jesus Who forgives and blesses; the Jesus Who heals and restores; the Jesus Who comes looking for us when we have long given up looking for Him, or have been looking in the wrong places.

It is not that we should stop looking; it is rather that we should be ready when He comes to find us. Will we know Him? Will we recognise Him? And will we, with all our hearts, believe in Him, love Him, and follow Him? Jesus lives. Will we, alongside Him, come alive also?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

ⁱ Jean Vanier, Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus

ⁱⁱ Song of Solomon 3:1

ⁱⁱⁱ John 20:2

^{iv} John 20:4-9

^v John 20:11

^{vi} John 20:12-13

^{vii} John 20:14-15

^{viii} Vanier p 337