

Mary Magdalene Patronal Festival

22.07.07

Song of Sol 3.1-4; 2Cor5.14-17; John20.1-2,11-18.

The one my heart loves Song of Songs 3

One of the many privileges in ministry is to hear stories of the life and times of people you have never met and have just missed. Stories full of happy memories and qualities of the loved one. Humour, heroism, participation in sport, music, art; love of animals, gardening, joinery, walking; their favourite pub their employment history and other aspects of their life and times. We build up a picture of their place in a community which is now very different.

The main element has to do with relationships. 'She was the backbone of the family; he held us all together; she was always there for us. Relatives are listed and often 'we don't know what we'll do without them.' Very high in the list of memories come acts of compassion: He nursed her for 3 years before she died; she never complained, they gave us the best start they could in life.

Even when the evidence is slim it may be said 'He'd do anything for anyone, she was always helpful, they watched songs of praise. Even if they weren't like that, it's what we think they ought to have been, in the presence of the almighty or his representative here on earth.

At the heart of this is love. Filial love of family and friends but more than this, it is the aspect of giving love which is being

grasped for the deceased. Do we know instinctively that love is more than feelings or fine words? Are we hard wired to recognise that the highest love is found in deeds and actions? I may speak with the tongues of angels, have prophetic powers understand all mysteries and all knowledge, have faith to remove mountain, give away everything ... but without love, which shows itself in action, I am nothing.

I will search for the one my heart loves

Mary got up early and went to the tomb to discover the stone rolled away. She called Peter and John who realise that something has happened, are not sure what and go home. Mary stays there weeping and sees the angels who ask her why she is weeping. Peter and John missed them. She turns and sees the one her heart loved.

There has been plenty of speculation about the relationship between Mary and Jesus in the 'Last temptation' and the 'Da Vinci Code.' They supply an element of erotic love for which there is no evidence in the gospel but for which there is a craving in this sensual age. I don't see why it shouldn't be there just as it is in all our human relationships.

The gospels are reflecting the fact that Mary, about whom we know very little, has experienced that new life Jesus gives. As Keith read to us: "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation." Luke's gospel tells us that Mary was set free from 7 demons. Tradition links her with the woman of ill repute who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears. She loved much

because she was set free from so much darkness in her life into the glorious light and freedom of the children of God.

Glance through the hymn book (I look at this now at morning prayer) and you will see how much the hymn writers are inspired by this new life: “Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me his praise should sing?” “Sound his praises, Jesus who bore our sorrows, love unbounded, wonderful deep and strong.” “Jesus thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art.”

Make no mistake, the gospels are focussed on the higher love that everyone instinctively recognises and values. Mary has come to stand for all of us who benefit from this.

“I have seen the Lord” Jn 20.18

Mary Magdalene touches on one of the great themes in story telling, the outcast who turns out to be the heroine in the end. Cinderella is excluded from the ball, but ends up a princess. The ugly duckling is ridiculed by all the animals but turns out to be not a duck but a swan. It’s the stuff of pantomime. Aladdin, Jack and the beanstalk come to mind. “The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone of the arch.”

It has happened not through the intervention of a fairy godmother or an elderly magician with genetically modified crops, but through the higher love that Jesus shows to Mary, and to us. The heart of the gospel is not just wishful thinking, but the result of the overwhelming love of God for us.

So Paul writes: “Christ’s love compels us – he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again ... If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.”

As a nation, we continue to fall far short of the active love that is the true inbuilt strength of our humanity. Whoever said ‘when the strong help the weak, everyone is stronger’ was putting their finger on the power of sacrificial love.

To live fully for Christ, in response to the love of God, is to become a more complete human being. In our increasingly self centred, fragmented society, the stories from the floods, are about people pulling together and supporting each other in ways unthinkable in other circumstances.

Pray for a deep sense of being a new creation in Christ and so learn to live sacrificially for the one our hearts love. Amen.

