

**St Edmundsbury Cathedral**  
**22nd July 2019**  
**Solemn Eucharist**  
**Song of Solomon 3:1-4, John 20, 1-2, 11-18**  
**Mary Magdalene**

Paint in your mind a picture of Mary Magdalene. What do you see? A woman of means? A peddler of sexual favours? A repentant penitent? A feminist icon, perhaps? The *Apostola Apsolorum*... a witness to the resurrection — the female Apostle to the Apostles? A grateful woman, healed of her demons?

What do you see? Perhaps your painting is a composite of those images?

The Gospels tell us of Mary Magdalene's unique place among Jesus' followers. From the region of Galilee, she was part of that group of women who resourced Jesus' itinerant preaching ministry. Mark and Luke both attest to her having been healed — the perfect number seven, seven demons driven from her to make her whole and all four Gospels place her at the foot of the cross on Good Friday, with all but John recording her presence at Jesus' burial. Depending on which Gospel account you read, she is, either alone, or with a group of other women, the first to discover the empty tomb. She is the first to testify and to tell of the Good News of Jesus' resurrection...

Re-membering Mary Magdalene is really complicated. Over the centuries she has become muddled with other biblical women. Of the many Marys.... Mary Mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany, Mary, mother of James the less, Mary, the mother of Clopas.... Mary Magdalene is perhaps the most enigmatic and mysterious, and today, she somehow draws us more deeply into the Jesus story.

It's complicated too, because as faith seeks understanding, questions are asked as we wonder about the ways of God. And in the same way too, we have wondered over the years about Mary. Gregory the Great, in the sixth century began to think that she may be the unnamed sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet... others wondered if she was the adulterous woman in John's gospel... and others still merged her story with that of Mary of Bethany. Mythical or otherwise, scandal sticks and her headline became that of prostitute saved by Jesus, the beautiful, lovestruck, sensual woman of Godspell fame who becomes so overcome by her emotions and immense gratitude that she can do nothing other in response than give up her own life as an act of penance in surrender and service.

Yet this does not sound to me like a Mary that Jesus may have nicknamed. 'The Sons of Thunder' for James and John.... Peter, The Rock and Mary the Tower... a link, perhaps, to the word 'magdala', Aramaic for tower. Now matter how hopelessly penitent or pathetically lovestruck she might be portrayed, to me her story speaks of a commitment to draw on a deeper strength, wisdom and experience to be able to endure life on the road and to stand with and to with-stand the journey through life with Jesus.

As often with matters of faith as we explore tradition and examine history we discover apparently conflicting reports, analyses and half-truths that yes, reveal something of the bigger picture we try to paint. Information shared from a particular perspective, with a particular point of view or for a particular purpose. But, to this head knowledge, if we add Mary's own voice, the voice of heart-felt experience I wonder what picture we might then paint:

"I have seen the Lord!"

You won't listen, I can tell you that now.  
You've always been suspicious, right from the start.

Mark my words — I know what you'll say  
'Making it all up!'

Not that I can blame you;  
I know how tongues wag,  
How easy it is to criticise.

Maybe I should have stayed away,

Kept my distance.  
But there was something about Him.  
I loved Him.  
Not like that.  
But deeply, with all that I am,  
All that I have,  
In a way I've never known love before.

I know it's hard to accept,  
Hard to forgive what used to be.  
And I can understand that —  
I'm finding it hard to forgive you  
For ignoring Him  
when he needed you most.

'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'.

He knows.  
We fail him.  
All unworthy.  
None perfect.

Suddenly He was no longer there.  
I thought I'd struggle on alone.  
No one really understands.

But I was wrong.  
He came to me.  
His voice, I heard a familiar voice.  
But it couldn't be?  
It had to be the gardener.  
Anyone else but Him.  
Not Him.

You'll do the same again, I'm sure.  
Tell me I've got it wrong,  
That I'm overwrought.  
That it's nonsense  
Believing in Him.

I tell you again, you won't listen.  
But then, I'm used to that.  
Does it really matter, what you know of me?  
For He knows me.  
Mary.  
And calls me.  
Mary Magdalene.  
And accepts me.  
Mary the Tower.

For I have seen the Lord.  
Have you?

*[reflection significantly adapted from Meditation of Mary Magdalene pp. 98, Nick Fawcett, Worship through the Seasons, Reflective Services for Lent, Holy Week and Easter published by Kevin Mayhew, 2001]*