



Mary Magdalene in the Garden by Sieger Köder

“While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb” Jn 20.1a

The night is at its darkest just before the dawn, they say. And this is the very moment when, in St John’s Gospel, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb. John’s phrase “while it was still dark”, underlines the darkness of Mary’s desolation: a man she loves deeply has been brutally killed and she has come to tend his mutilated body.

By the time she has found the tomb’s broken opening and discovered the devastating fact that Jesus’ body has gone, the sun is beginning to rise. (Is this the moment captured by Köder in his painting? Certainly, he streaks the Jerusalem sky with reds and oranges and tinges the clouds with pink.) Mary runs to Peter and John and breathlessly shares the shocking news. The three return to the tomb together, the two men going right in and finding the linen wrappings. And then dazed and still hardly daring to believe, Peter and John go home again.

But Mary stayed. Emboldened by love she stands her ground, weeping, at the place of death. And then she bends down to look into the tomb herself. And she sees angels. “They have taken away my Lord,” she wails, and then turns round and sees ... the gardener? (So perhaps this, then, is the moment captured in the painting?) The conversation Mary has with him changes everything – not just for her but for everyone, everywhere.

What do we see as we gaze at this painting in the context of coronavirus?

We see a human life as fractured as the gravestones by which she kneels. We see in Mary’s face and body the same grief and confusion and trauma as that created by COVID-19.

But we also see afresh that “in getting down and looking into the black places of our lives, we, too, sometimes find angels” (Ward and Wild, *Human Rites* 1995) and that it is *because* she remains steadfastly there by the empty tomb that Mary encounters the risen Christ...

“To believe in the risen Jesus is to trust that the transformational power of God is active in the human world, available and relevant to every situation.”

Rowan Williams

Prayer

**Risen Jesus,
embolden those who weep
to look for you in the darkness
and to glimpse there
the Light of your new dawn. Amen**