

LOVE HURTS, LOVE HEALS

Scripture Readings: Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:1-10

Texts: Jeremiah 31:3; Matthew 28:1

According to the gospel of Matthew, two women go to Jesus' tomb early on Easter morning. We have heard the story of Easter enough times that we might not think much about the details of the story. As I went through the account in the gospel of Matthew again, the detail of two women going to the tomb seemed more compelling to me than before.

Only one woman is found at the tomb in the four gospels we have in the New Testament; that is, only Mary Magdalene is found in each story. Actually the gospel writer in Matthew calls her Miriam, I think to remind us of Moses' sister. Throughout the gospel of Matthew, Jesus has been portrayed as the new Moses, so it is only appropriate that Miriam also be present. Miriam/Mary is a mysterious figure who only shows up in the gospels at the execution of Jesus and at his tomb; only the gospel writer of Luke mentions her briefly before these events to indicate that she was one of the people Jesus healed.

Mary is an unusual woman because she is not identified by her connection to the men in her life (not even tangentially as a widow). Instead, Mary is seemingly connected to a place name much like Jesus of Nazareth or Simon of Cyrene. The problem is that it is not Mary "of" or Mary "the" Magdalene and the place itself is missing—Magdala cannot be clearly identified by archeologists from several possible candidates. The word "Magdala" probably has been derived from the Aramaic word for tower. This connection makes the idea that Mary is from Magdala even more problematic—which tower in a country filled with towers is it? And even if, we could connect her to a particular tower, why would anyone outside of her local community associate her with that tower?

What we do know is that Jesus had a propensity to nickname his disciples: Simon Peter really means Simon/Rock, the sons of Zebedee, James and John were named the sons of thunder/noise. Perhaps the, Miriam Magdalene is Mary/Tower. In his Bible Jesus would know that tower is a great nickname; a figurative tower in the Hebrew Bible is a symbol for strength, protection, and in the Song of Songs, a symbol of feminine beauty. Mary would be one of Jesus' closest disciples, his tower of strength and protection.

The other Mary is a little easier to know; besides Mary Magdalene, she is the only woman to show up at the tomb in the synoptic gospels. The gospel writer of Matthew probably refers to the Mary at Jesus' execution, the mother of James and Joseph—see, one of the women known by the men in her life. Now, you may wonder how that helps; the gospel writer has given us a big clue back in the 13th chapter. When Jesus goes back to his home town, the community expresses doubt about his wisdom because he is the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joseph. The other Mary is Jesus' mother; it would seem only natural that his mother would be at his execution and want to come to his tomb.

On Easter morning we have Jesus' closest female disciple—his sister if you will—and his mother coming to the tomb. These two women, near and dear to Jesus, come to the tomb to be present out of their great love for him. We can imagine that they are broken hearted and grieving over his unjust death; we can see why they come so early in the morning, I would imagine that they have not been able to sleep or able to find much comfort. Their pain comes from their love; they are an example of the corollary: I hurt because I love. To love someone deeply means that we open ourselves to pain if we lose that person.

The women come to the tomb because of their love. We know that such deep love could not exist and continue to exist without that love being shared. We cannot doubt that Jesus had loved deeply his Tower and his mother; they come to the tomb because, for them, he and his love had seemingly been lost forever.

I think that if we can accept that Jesus loved Mary, his Tower, and Mary, his mother, then we can embrace an even larger corollary: Because God loves, God hurts. Jesus, as the embodiment of God's love, demonstrates the depth of God's love for us; through Jesus, God came into the world to show us the power of love, God knew the risk of loving us in such an intimate and personal way—we might reject that love.

We did and do, in violent and terrible ways.

Now when we are hurt, even when we love, we often want to retaliate by hurting another as a response. Thus, in spite of love, hurt and retaliation expand outward and end up ruling our world. When harm is done, we expect to harm in return.

But God's love for us is so deep that God did not retaliate. God's love and forgiveness for our violence was given on the cross. The resurrection became a vindication of this forgiveness and non-retaliation. God risked the hurt of our violence because God loves us over any other response because God's love is the only way to heal the world.

Jesus' beloved Tower and his mother became witnesses to this ultimate act of love in the resurrection. Once they understood that nothing could kill such love, they became messengers of this love to the disciples and to the rest of the world. They dared to risk hurt in order to love. Legend says that both Mary/Tower and Mary, Jesus' mother, died far from their homeland because they felt compelled by love to share the Good News of God's risen and living love in Christ. They became among the first apostles to love even when it might hurt.

We have also been called to be apostles to share good news with a broken and hurting world. Will we dare to love and risk the hurt? We can trust the depth of God's love for us, a love that risked the greatest hurt of all, but overcame that hurt to love us all the more. Will we dare to love and risk the hurt? The only way to heal the world is to finally risk the love we have been given so freely and abundantly.

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