

"She Was There"

I wonder what was going through Mary's mind on that Easter Day?

"I woke early, as I barely slept...I've not slept in what feels like eons...this past week. The horror - it's too much to bear.

We came to Jerusalem with him, they call him Jesus, yet to me he is Yeshua. He knew he had to fulfill the scripture - we all have been looking for The One without really knowing until recently, that he IS The One. The Chosen.

Pilate had his fancy parade with lavish excess and debauchery. What did we do? As scripture foretold, Yeshua asked for a donkey and rode that into the city centre. It took ages and we laughed and waved our ditch weeds. The people who greeted us along the way knew we were coming. And they waved too. Their shouts were not of triumph but fear and pleading 'Hosanna, save us, please get us out of this place.'

Yeshua stopped at the synagogue and stood, mouth agape at the cacophony of sound. Money changers charging extortionist prices. Sellers hawking their wares of pigeons and turtle doves. After giving us that knowing look, he turned over the tables and let them have it!"

"Stop making my father's house a marketplace". How dare they? How very dare they treat this sacred place in this way. And yet the maddening crowds did not listen to what Yeshua said. They didn't understand who Yeshua's father was.

I've known him about the same amount of time as his apostles. I heard of this itinerant preacher from Nazareth who was said to be able to cure people of infirmities. Not just of the body, but of the mind as well. I needed healing. I needed to be seen and heard. And he did. He saw me. He healed me. I believed in him - and he believed in me. After I'd been told it was all in my head, he healed me and from that day on I devoted my life to God. And to God's son, my Yeshua.

Of course the other guys wanted nothing to do with me. They were fine as long as I was financing the journey, but I asked for a few minutes with Yeshua when they were all together and I quickly got the cold shoulder.

I would show them – yes I would. I wanted to learn and study from our rabbouni. And yet, as a woman it was not allowed. Bah.

I served as he gathered them together in that special upstairs room. We were completely safe there. No fear of anyone attacking from outside. Except that one time with Judas.

They were finished eating and I was about to begin, when Yeshua stood up from the table, he took off his outer robe and in his tunic he wrapped a towel around his waist, took a large bowl, filled it with water and knelt before his disciples. He washed their feet. They were embarrassed and would not look at him. Peter got it wrong – as usual. But that's Peter.

I washed his feet - Yeshua with my tears of gratitude and dried them with my hair. Then I broke open a bottle of expensive perfume and anointed his feet. He deserves only the best. None of the others really understood who he was at that point. I knew.

He finished washing their feet and the authorities came in. Judas kissed Jesus and fled. Jesus was arrested and the others fled as well. We were all shocked. I hurriedly tidied up then went to find out where they had taken him.

It was a kangaroo court. Pilate tried everything to have his sentence commuted, but the stupid crowd, filled with bloodlust wanted Jesus dead. They had NO idea what they were doing and saying...they'd been whipped into a frenzy with that stupid Judas and now they wanted blood.

They even went so far as to demand the release of a murderer and thief instead of Jesus. Idiots and imbeciles. And we, the women, were helpless to raise our voices against the baying crowd. We could not be heard.

And so we watched helplessly while he was stripped and beaten. Humiliated and tortured, all because of the ignorant and impudent Pilate. He literally "washed his hands" of the entire situation and let him go - to be killed.

Once he was nailed to the cross bar and lifted into place the crowd became quieter. They had their pound of flesh, they had defeated his spirit and there was nothing left to watch. The guards teased him, and made him a crown of thorns. The smell of blood was enough to turn your stomach, but we couldn't look away. We couldn't leave him there – alone.

His mothers sobs lasted so long that she began soundlessly baying in pain and agony. There was no consoling her. And yet we couldn't look away.

Suddenly the sky got dark as though it were the middle of the night and there was a tremendous earthquake. The darkness felt like it lasted days, but it was only a few hours. Then, as suddenly as it was dark; once again it was light.

Yeshua moaned and prayed and chanted the psalms. He knew he had to die, yet how could he have known it would be this horrible? It was excruciating to watch helplessly – how much more atrocious was it for him?

We watched him grow weaker, and just before he drew his last breath he told us all, loudly "Father, I am yours."

The crowd dispersed, happy to get on with the Passover preparations. The sun was preparing to set and there was no time to lose. Joseph of Arimathea asked for Jesus' body. Together we prepared him as quickly as possible - there was no time to lose. And as we crawled out of the tomb and stood up the sun was passing the horizon.

"Tell no-one where he is," Joseph ordered us. And heartbroken we all went home to wait until the celebration of the Passover was ended.

Three long days later, we returned. We were heavily laden with myrrh, perfume and spices. We had no idea how much or how little decay would have taken place in the three days. I ran to the tomb barely able to see through the tears in my eyes. How would I ever be able to tell him how much he means to me? How would I ever be able to thank him for saving my life?

I was beginning to fret at how I would move the stone when to my shock it was already moved. I cried out and dropped to my knees sobbing. Fearing the worst I peeked into the tomb. It was empty.

I ran to where Peter and others were hiding and told them what I saw. Peter and the other one ran there but I was too tired to run. I just wanted to lay down and rest. Truth be told, I wanted to die.

As I was approaching the tomb the two ran away, confirming that Jesus was missing. Once again I dropped to my knees at the entrance to the tomb and sobbed. Roils of nausea and fear gripped my insides. I was in this alone.

Controlling my breath, I looked inside the tomb and could barely believe my eyes. There were two angels – inside the tomb! They asked me why I was crying. I mean, wouldn't you be if the one who loved you completely was missing? Who had him? Why had he been taken? WHERE had he been taken? He had to be properly prepared for burial!! There hadn't been a designated Chevra Kadisha because of the Passover, but I was here now to make sure it was done properly, according to custom.

I saw another man and thought he must know where Jesus was. And so I asked him, but it wasn't just anyone who answered me. It was my Yeshua. I knew it was him because he said my name. Not only because he said my name but HOW he said my name. "Mary".

Praise God! I threw my arms around him and he recoiled. No, you cannot hold onto me. Go and tell the others that I am to be ascending to my God and your God. Go quickly, make haste.

And knowing deep inside that all would be as it was meant to be, I went, as fast as my legs would carry me, back to where Peter and the others were. I burst through the doorway and as they looked up, I told them, "I have seen the Lord."

She was there. Mary of Magdala was there. She was not a wife or lover of Jesus, there was too much other stuff to do. And despite what Dan Brown would like you to think, they were not lovers, nor did they have children together.

She did not ever marry. After she had been cured of what was referred to as seven demons, she devoted her life to the Christ. She and a few other ladies bankrolled the apostles.

Mary of Magdala is known as the apostle to the apostles because she was as important to Jesus as the men. He chose her to appear first. He CHOSE her.

How could she be a prostitute and fallen woman? Thanks to Pope Gregory V, that myth caught fire. You see, back in that day, a woman of independent financial means could only have been through her husband's endowment or if she was a prostitute. There was no legal way for a woman to make that kind of money.

Pope Gregory's lies were discredited in the 15th Century. And yet, current secular thinking still believes the faint whiff of scandal from the hands of Pope Gregory. She was not a fallen woman. She was not possessed by demons. Her demons may have been addiction, or mental health issues. Regardless, she believed enough in Jesus that she was cured of these infirmities.

Jesus loved her enough that she was healed and became another apostle. Whether she was truly Jesus' "beloved disciple" or simply an apostle from the sidelines, without Mary of Magdala there would be no resurrection story.

Well, there may have been, but it would not have been this spectacular. This year, 2022, marks the first Holy Week since 2019 when we were allowed to be here in person. Since COVID we have celebrated Easter Day in a more muted and understated fashion.

This year things are different. Today, in 2022, we are celebrating an Easter Day like any other and yet an Easter Day like none other.

If you remember nothing else of this Holy Week, please remember this - Mary Magdalene - She was there.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed Alleluia!

The Reverend Andrea L. Brennan, Incumbent
Elk Valley Ecumenical Shared Ministry
Fernie Knox United Church & Christ Church Anglican
Fernie, BC Sermon for Easter - 17 April 2022
John 20.1-18