

RETHINKING THE EASTER STORY – MARCH, 2020

The treasured memories of those who have loved us refuse to die after they have passed away. The memory of a dramatic life-changing experience in our relationship with them is able to be re-activated by a related subsequent happening. And with it comes the associated feeling of fear or anxiety or regret or satisfaction and enjoyment, and even the cultivation of our imagination in a positive or negative way. We use the sensory language of living human beings to describe the original life-changing experiences. But what language is adequate to describe those belated, reactivated impressions. I suggest that we sometimes describe them as if they are actually sensory often caused by a repetition of the intense circumstances under which the original stimuli took place. They are very difficult to describe without the use of sensory language. On reading Mark's Easter Story again I suggest that he and his informants were trying to describe the same phenomenon in regard to Mary Magdalene and the disciples.

According to Mark, Mary Magdalene was a deeply disturbed woman who had experienced a remarkable healing encounter with Jesus of Nazareth. This was her dramatic life-changing experience. I think the compassion and authority with which he dismissed her demons would have endeared him to her. Some biblical scholars even suggest that they were married. Therefore, the intensity of witnessing his suffering and death by crucifixion would for her have been traumatic beyond words. So, with that vivid memory she returns after the Sabbath to the apparently safe place where she had laid his body only to find (further trauma) his precious remains had been stolen! Her troubled mind refused to admit she had lost him and she determined to pursue her intuition by going to Galilee where she could relive his transforming friendship and be a faithful witness to his disciples that he was, in her opinion, still alive.

Mark personifies Mary Magdalene's Galilee intuition by locating a divine messenger in brilliant white clothing in the empty sepulchre who told her to go and meet the risen Jesus in Galilee, and then to tell the eleven disciples. According to Mark, Mary then claimed to have had a sighting (sensory) of Jesus in Galilee which she reported to the disciples. The disciples then allegedly had a sensory and auditory experience of Jesus upbraiding them for not believing Mary's testimony. .

Then I read Matthew whose divine messenger is also credited with having rolled back the stone from the tomb with the assistance of an earthquake. He was not inside the tomb like Mark's messenger, but outside sitting on the stone. Despite the women's fear, he manages to get them to come inside and verify that Jesus had risen. He then repeats Mark's message, that they should go to Galilee and meet him. Matthew's use of sensory stimuli are in abundance!! Along the road, Jesus appears to them – SIGHT. He greets them – HEARING. They hold him by the feet and worship him – TOUCH. If taken literally, this is a lot of holy crap. This is not to mention Matthew's gobbledegook about the tomb guards being struck unconscious with fear by the resurrection happenings. This all leads me to wonder what extra sensory phenomenon were at play in the language of Mary Magdalene and others as they recalled their precious encounters with Jesus

By the time Luke wrote, the empty tomb story had been embellished yet again. The Authorised Version says that the women had a **vision** of not one, but two angels at the empty sepulchre who announced Jesus' bodily resurrection and pointed to his folded grave clothes. Luke then uses sensory language to describe the experience of the two disciples who were the first to encounter him on their walk to Emmaus. They were met by an embodied Jesus who could walk and could talk and could drop in for a cup of tea!!! The embellishments to the resurrection story in the Gospel of John are even more unbelievable having been retold and written towards the end of the first century. (Incidentally, Luke, would you please tell me where from and how your risen Jesus got his new suit of shining garments!!!)

The above critique enhances my appreciation of a historical Jesus who was fully human and who died the death of a real human being. It is no wonder that His beautiful life, as I imagine it to have been, caused the ancients to record these mythological resurrection stories about him. Remember that I did not say, the stories themselves were holy crap. I said, IF TAKEN LITERALLY, they were holy crap!! The attributions of deity if intended literally would have caused this humble, holy man to protest. I am encouraged so to believe by Lloyd Geering who wrote, "You can't understand the meaning of the resurrection unless you believe that the bones of Jesus lie in Palestine."

Eric Stevenson