

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



All Souls Chapel East Window

Easter Sunday

Reading: John 20: 11-18

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Commentary

This window depicts Easter Sunday morning: the Risen Jesus greets a weeping Mary Magdalene. Designed by J.W. Bonnor, (as were the side windows – see Holy Monday), it reveals the moment of recognition in the garden when Mary, realising it is Jesus, calls out 'Rabboni'. The word is inscribed above her head. And we see how Jesus simply responds: 'Mary.'

We should know something important is going to happen because it is set in a garden. In the Book of Genesis, the creation of humanity took place in a garden. In the Song of Solomon, two people fall in love in a garden, an allegory for the relationship of God and His people, of Christ and the Church. Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane and it is there He is betrayed and arrested. And in this garden, near to where Jesus had been crucified, the Risen Christ makes Himself known. Here Mary Magdalene finds Christ ‘the first fruits of the new creation’: found in the midst of suffering, found in the loving intimacy of being called by her own name, found in the hope of Resurrection life.

The subject matter of the window is appropriate to the sad story of the dedicatee, Edward Lamplugh Lennon Waring. He was Assistant Chief Surveyor and Land Office in the East Africa Protectorate. It was recorded that he had become mentally ill in Nairobi and on his way back to Britain shot himself at Wexford in Ireland, his body falling into the sea and not recovered. Poignantly, at the top of the window is a text from the Song of Solomon (8:6-7), ‘For Love is stronger than Death; many waters cannot quench Love, neither can the floods drown it.’ It was given by his parents who lived at 16 Priory Gardens.

Meditation

Mary Magdalen thought the Risen Jesus was a gardener.

St Gregory the Great thought there was good reason for this: ‘Was not he a gardener of the soul for her? Is it not he who sowed the seed of his love in the heart of Mary, to grow green virtues?’

The famous Jacobean preacher, Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, quotes St Gregory in a beautiful sermon as he illustrates just how God is a gardener:

First, He is the planter of "the fairest garden that ever was, Paradise. He was the gardener; it was of His planting. So, a gardener."

Secondly, ever since then He "makes all our gardens green, sends us yearly the spring, and all the herbs and flowers we then gather; and neither Paul with his planting, nor Apollos with his watering, could do any good without Him. So a gardener in that sense."

Thirdly, He is the gardener of "our souls too, and makes them, as the prophet [Jeremiah] says, like 'a well-watered garden;' weeds out of them whatsoever is noisome or unsavoury, sows and plants them with true roots and seeds of righteousness, waters them with the dew of His grace, and makes them bring forth fruit to eternal life."

Yet, even more than this, continues Lancelot Andrewes, Easter proves Christ is our gardener.

‘Christ rising was indeed a gardener, and that a strange one, Who made such a herb grow out of the ground this day as the like was never seen before, a dead body to shoot forth alive out of the grave. The bursting forth from the tomb means that the Lord's gardening is also for our gain. This eternal garden is thus the gift of the Resurrection of Christ. Just as the beginning of spring heralds the certainty of life and loveliness

ahead, so does the Resurrection. This brings hope to our hearts that have been imprisoned by death and sin: "The hope of that life immortal is the very life of this life mortal."

The good news that Andrewes relates is that we do not have to wait until we have died to experience the eternal life because Christ's resurrection enables us to enjoy our "inheritance" now. The resurrection gives grace; "this day it has an efficacy continuing, that shows forth itself" in the Holy Mysteries. Like Mary Magdalene, we too can recognise Him not only as our Gardener but also in the breaking of the Bread at every Eucharist, Alleluia!



*A Hymn by John Macleod Campbell Crum, 1872-1958, Canon of
Canterbury Cathedral*

Now the green blade riseth, from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.

In the grave they laid Him, Love who had been slain,
Thinking that He never would awake again,
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.

Forth He came at Easter, like the risen grain,
Jesus who for three days in the grave had lain;
Quick from the dead the risen One is seen:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Jesus' touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.

Prayer

Almighty Father,
who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples
with the sight of the risen Lord:
give us such knowledge of his presence with us,
that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life
and serve you continually in righteousness and truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen