

# *From Tears to Contemplation*

## *Reflecting on the Easter Mystery*

Kerrie Hide



*Mary Stayed at the Tomb Weeping*

Jn 20:11

There are numerous exquisite icons of Mary of Magdala and Jesus in the garden of the tomb where Jesus was buried, but as far as I am aware, none catch the moment where Mary is alone, facing the stark nothingness of the absence of her beloved Jesus, Yesua. Yet, John begins this luminous narrative, by immersing us in the pathos of emptiness, in tears wept by the one who stayed present in every moment of Christ's dying. John remarks, "Mary stayed at the tomb weeping." Her weeping suggests that though her heart is devastated by the loss of her Beloved, she will go on vulnerably loving. And the Greek term stayed (εἰστήκει *heistēkei*) emphasises that she stands still, she places herself at the tomb, she participates in the emptiness of absence. She feels the emptiness, the loneliness, the struggle, the fear of abandonment and death's final erasing of her Beloved Yesua. She waits, enfolded in night's darkness. As the gospel of John continues to unfold the story, it is so easy to pass by this critical moment of simply staying at the tomb, in the in-between, in the nothingness, in the nada. Meister Eckhart asks the question, "Why did Mary stay when all others had fled?" Eckhart immerses us in Mary's grief as he responds, "All she had she had lost with him. When he died, she died with him. When they buried him, they buried her soul with him."<sup>1</sup> Eckhart is inviting us to live this same yielding of our love into this dying moment with Jesus. With similar aching anguish, Julian of Norwich evokes for us how when Jesus in his dying poured out his love and his life so completely that his body became like

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<sup>1</sup> Based on *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans and ed, Maurice O'C. Walshe (New York: Crossroad, 2009), Sermon 86, 418.

cloth blowing in the wind, the earth sorrowed. Even the sun and the moon wept at this time of this Wounded One's dying.<sup>2</sup> Currently, we know this deep dying as we weep for all the unnecessary suffering and dying of so many from the coronavirus and face the critical turning point of this climate crisis moment. This is the moment we must embrace. We must learn to pause, to stay at the tomb, to wait in the nothingness, in the vulnerability of the still point of this tomb space.

Still, it is not just a matter of waiting. For as Mary waits, she bends over to look, to behold, her Beloved in the tomb. We expect her to see a shrouded body, but Jesus is not there. There is no body, no-thing. This "Great Nothing", Beatrice Bruteau reminds us, is a high symbol, the symbol to which everything else on this easter journey has led.<sup>3</sup> The whole way of the cross, the suffering, the abandonment, the dying leads Mary, and us, into the silence of this sacred nothingness, where the Word that was spoken from the divine contemplation in the beginning (Jn 1:1) and named in creation as Jesus, has returned to the divine Silence and is silent. The Word spoken in love and enfleshed as Jesus is now gathered into the essential unity in a Trinitarian oneing within the κόλπον *kolpon*, hollow, heart, bosom or womb, of the Father (Jn 1:18) and unity of the Spirit, in One Love. In this moment, at the tomb, as Mary weeps, there is no body, there is nothing outside Mary for her to cling to, nothing to observe, nothing for her senses to grasp, nothing for her to think, nothing for her to do. There is only the emptying of pure loving, that takes her deeper and deeper until, simply, she is so empty, she feels immersed in nothingness. John invites us to stay with Mary, in this great nothing, until paradoxically, as her weeping empties her into the spaciousness of this holy nothing, Mary beholds two angels in white where the body of Jesus had laid (Jn 20:12). John invites us to behold, to be and to hold spirit vision, by returning to this nothing. The Greek term that John uses, (θεωρεῖ *theōrei*) to behold, stresses a unitive seeing that infuses the angelic-like vision that Mary experiences. Notably, *theōrei* later came to express silent, still, absorption in God in contemplation. Thus, John is not so much suggesting that Mary has a bodily sight of angels in white. For John, these angels illumine the point between heaven and earth, infinite and finite. The angels awaken Mary to a new unitive heart awareness.



Shocked and still clinging to her old ways of seeing, this invitation to see in a new way thrusts Mary into confusion, until she hears uttered in the silence, first from the angels and then from the Risen One, "Woman, why do you weep? The question resounds throughout all creation, "Why do we weep?" Why do we weep

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<sup>2</sup> See, Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Showing 18.

<sup>3</sup> Beatrice Bruteau, *The Easter Mysteries*, (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 132.

when Christ has entered into the depths of suffering and death and has risen? Then, as the more well-known part of this story unfolds, and Mary mistakes the risen Jesus for the gardener, in the unity of this timeless moment, she hears her name, "Mary." In this ecstatic instance, Mary's heart awakens. She beholds and sees. Her heart knows that her Beloved who was crucified, is risen. In the intimacy of naming Mary, the Word who was spoken from the silence and intimacy of divine contemplation, speaks her name, placing her within the midst of this exquisite dance of Silence speaking the Word into creation. In the mystical marriage of Silence and Word, in the oneing vision of contemplation, Mary participates in the loving that names her. She partakes of the contemplation of God, in God's self. Infused with love's silence Mary herself, then speaks from this silence, naming the risen one "*Rabboni!*" (Teacher). Astonishingly, this teacher does not simply tell us about God, he shows us how to be one with God, by being one with him. In this reciprocal naming, all human beings are named and acknowledged as belonging to God and invited to participate in the oneing of love within divine contemplation. All humankind is infused with the capacity to go within the tomb-cave of our heart, into the great nothing and discover the luminous oneness of the risen Christ who arises from the ground of our heart-consciousness, teaching us how to behold from within our Christic identity.



*Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene, ca. 1405, from a Biblia Pauperum, Netherlands, held in the British Library, London. Note the heart wound on the hand of the risen Christ, the gardener and the receptivity of Mary's open hands.*

Before we continue to reflect further on the intimacy of the risen presence of Christ, John calls us to embrace, I invite you to enter into the silence of divine contemplation in the ground of your heart and hear Love whisper your name in Silence.

The beauty and complexity of just what is being conveyed in this resurrection scene in John continues to unfold as Jesus' words initiate a new way of unitive seeing in Mary, as he says, "Do not hold on to me." We are not to hold onto, or cling to the Jesus Mary knew, because in the resurrection, Jesus becomes the Christ. Now, it is the crucified and risen Christ who continues to arise in us, into conscious awareness through contemplation, enabling us to claim our embodied and transcendent personhood in Christ and live within our resurrection body. The risen one offers us a peace, a silence, a transparency within our heart, so that we can no longer look at and observe Christ as separate to us. We can only behold and see Christ, by reflexively returning to the ground of our heart, in silent loving, so that Christ can rise within us. Although this rising takes place beyond all our discursive ways of knowing, our heart senses this indwelling presence that longs to rise to our conscious awareness until we behold in the one Christ consciousness. When this Christic oneing heart consciousness stabilizes we become the body of Christ, Christs for each other. We enable the formation of a Christosphere, a communion of people illumined by Christ consciousness. We become active participants in the art of creating, of incarnating, of oneing. In this resurrection consciousness, Christ frees us from the ignorance of making God an object, into participating within the oneing of divine love that is ours eternally. We behold and see the world as Christ beholds and sees the world. The Gospel of Mary Magdalene, describes this transition powerfully:

*"I left this world with the aid of another world; a design was erased, by virtue of a higher design. Henceforth I travel towards Repose, where time rests in the Eternity of time. I go now into Silence." Having said all this Mary became silent, for it was in silence that the Teacher spoke to her.<sup>4</sup>*

The resurrection erases the world view that sees God as uninvolved in or separate from creation and invites us to claim our oneness with Christ in creation. Our task now is to cultivate this silence, stabilize in this resurrection consciousness and live with an awakened Christ consciousness that beholds and sees from the ground of our heart, from our oneness in Christ. May we go now into silence and open ever more fully to this Christic loving, as we hear our names echo in the silence when we meet in communion in our contemplative evolution network.



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<sup>4</sup> *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* trans. Jean-Yves Leloup (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2002).