

Easter Sunday – John 20:1-9

Mary Madalene, Peter, John

Jesus himself never appears in our passage from John. The time is early and it is still dark, which means for John that Christ who is the light of the world is absent. Three disciples react to this absence.

-**Mary Magdalene** is the first; we read only the first half of her story, but we notice how her faith is at an *early stage*. Her devotion brought her to the tomb, but the missing body can only mean for her that someone has taken it away. *Jesus himself* will have to search her out *to bring her to full belief*.

-The second is **Peter**. At the end of the discourse on the Bread of Life, he makes an impressive personal commitment to Jesus but later denied three times that he even knew him. *So wounded was he spiritually* by these denials that even though he saw the grave clothes lying there, he could not conclude to the truth.

-The **third disciple** is not named, but he has already appeared at the side of Jesus at the supper and was present at the foot of the cross. He enjoyed this intimacy with Jesus because he already had the *right relationship* with him, that of mutual love. For this reason, he could run faster than Peter and he drew the correct conclusion from the grave clothes which he saw in the tomb. He himself a model believer, he became not only the authority for his community for the material contained in this gospel, but an example to them. They were to believe as he believed: their relationship to Jesus was to be that of *friends*, not servants.

The question of his identity is still debated, but this is of small importance compared with his significance. Usually, he is identified with *John*. He represents **all faithful disciples of Jesus** through all ages of the church. Their *loving intimacy with Jesus* ensures that though they do not see Jesus physically, they believe without seeing.

Who moved the stone? The women could not have moved it. It took many strong men to move it. Neither the Jews nor the Romans would have moved it, because they both wanted Jesus to stay very, very dead. It was guarded by armed Roman soldiers, so the disciples could not have done it. And if they did, then they deliberately lied about the Resurrection; so, if they knew it was a lie, why would they all let themselves be arrested and imprisoned and tortured and martyred for this lie? Martyrdom doesn't prove truth, but it certainly proves sincerity.

What Peter and John see is not just an empty tomb but the grave clothes, both the shroud that wrapped the body and the face cloth, neatly folded away. Jesus forgets no detail, one commentator offered. Remember, he was the one who had to remind the family of the little girl he brought back from the dead to give her something to eat.

We have both of these linen cloths today: the Shroud at Turin, and the sudarium, the face cloth, at Manoppello in Italy; they have both withstood sober, secular, scientific analysis. They are genuine.

John saw and believed. Thomas believed, even though he had to see first. Like Peter and John and Thomas, we understand only after we believe. Faith is an understanding, a spiritual seeing. It is not a leap in the dark. It is a leap in the light.