

Last night at the Easter Vigil, as the Easter Candle was blessed, a prayer was said over it, which includes these words: "All time belongs to him, and all the ages."

The Easter Vigil: The Service of Light

History winds its way through time, and mostly it seems to rush past us, but occasionally there are moments when time stands still, and history changes course.

This is just such a moment for Mary Magdalen in the Gospel.

But why do we believe that the death of this one man, Jesus, compared to millions of other cruel deaths endured throughout human history, changed the course of history forever, and is our salvation?

Why wasn't His death just that - one among millions?

Why do we believe that His death wasn't the end, the final curtain?

When Jesus let Himself be taken willingly to the Cross: "Led like a lamb to the slaughter."

Is. 53: 7 He wasn't just a man being executed.

God, in Jesus, took frail flesh and become a person: "Who takes away the sin of the world."

Jn. 1: 29

Although His love for us is without any limits, it's a costly love.

A love that endured physical, and spiritual death for us, so that when we die the underlying terror of that moment isn't terrible anymore.

He gives His redeeming love as a beautiful gift to us: but unless we accept it, thank Him for it, and become submerged in it, then the terror remains to haunt us.

We need to take hold for ourselves the truth that the Lord loves me just as I am at this moment.

The truth, as Paul says in Scripture, is that: "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." Rm. 5: 8

Yet we trust in His costly loving because, as Peter wrote: "For you know that God paid a ransom to save [us] from [our] empty life ...[with] the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God." 1 Pet. 1: 18 - 19

The death of Jesus affects each of us; and each person who has ever, and will ever live, because Jesus absorbed into Himself the primary suffering of each of us.

The primary suffering of being estranged, and alienated from God because of our sin.

Perhaps to someone looking at us Christians, and the way we relate to Jesus and one another, that present of salvation can be rejected quite easily.

Certainly if the way we live out our following of Christ leaves Him fixed to the Cross, or mummified in the Tomb; then we're not giving His living love to a world that's suspended in lovelessness and hopelessness.

But we do possess love, and hope because we know Jesus rose from the dead to give eternal life to those who turn to Him. He who is: "The way, the truth, and the life." Jn. 14: 6

We must keep revisiting the Empty Tomb to be reminded of that fact; reminded that the stone has been rolled away, that Jesus isn't there, that He's risen from the dead.

Not just appearing to die on the Cross, not just resuscitated to die a natural death in old age, but stone-cold dead.

Yet death didn't consume, and hold on to Him; and I know it can't and won't consume us if we believe and trust in Him as our Risen Saviour.

"Death is swallowed up in [His] victory." 1 Cor. 15: 54 (Is. 25: 8 Septuagint)

Peter and John went inside the Empty Tomb and, on the basis of the evidence they saw there, believed that Jesus had risen.

Although they didn't fully understand or comprehend at that moment; nevertheless they believed.

Mary Magdalen, from whom Jesus had earlier cast out seven demons, See Lk. 8: 2 didn't go inside the tomb.

She stayed behind outside distraught, and weeping.

We don't know what those demons were. But however they'd manifested themselves, they'd cast her down into utter darkness from which Jesus had raised her up.

On that Sunday morning she'd set out in the darkness just before dawn, that time when night's at its darkest, to complete the burial rites for her Lord.

Mary, in a darkness of despair so deep, must have felt that the demons had returned to haunt her.

Where was Jesus now? How could a dead Jesus save her?  
 A dead Jesus can't save us from anything: a living Jesus can.  
 On Good Friday, in a ritualised and sanitised way, we relived the Crucifixion of Jesus.  
 Yes, we relived the Crucifixion; but did I really take to heart what it means to me?  
 After three agonising hours on the Cross Jesus: "Bowed his head and gave up his spirit." Jn.19: 30  
 Joseph of Arimethea took the dead body of Jesus, and buried the Lord in the new tomb Joseph had prepared for his own death.  
 Symbolic, don't you think, of the way that Jesus has taken our place?  
 He's taken our horror of death, and laid it to rest with Him in the tomb.  
 A four foot by four foot rock-hewn tomb; cold and dark.  
 God allowed Himself to be put in a place like this.  
 The Light of the World was extinguished in the shroud of death.  
 Allowed Himself to be put in this dark, tight, claustrophobic room.  
 Allowed them to seal it shut with a boulder - God in a tomb.  
 Nothing is blacker than a grave, as lifeless as a pit, as permanent as a crypt. But into the crypt He came.  
 The next time you find yourself entombed in a darkened world of fear, remember that.  
 The next time pain boxes you in a world of horror, remember His tomb.  
 The next time a stone seals your exit to peace, think about that empty, musty tomb outside Jerusalem.  
 In your mind, go into the tomb. Bow down, enter quietly, and look closely.  
 For there on the wall, using the sight given to us through our faith in the Lord, you'll see the charred marks of a Divine explosion.  
 The Lord of Life rising from death for you.  
 You might even hear the voice of the angels, which guarded the empty tomb, saying to you: "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead!" Lk.24: 5 - 6  
 Easter Day is THE day for saying absolutely clearly, plainly, and without any apologies what the truth is.  
 And so today I testify that I believe - no, I know, Christ is Risen - and that death has lost its sting for me. See 1 Cor. 15: 55 (Hos. 13: 14 Septuagint)  
 I believe because of the Empty Tomb, the eye-witness testimony of Peter, John and Mary Magdalen handed down to us through the Church, and my own 40 year friendship with the Risen Jesus.  
 I believe that Easter is the defining moment when time stood still, history changed its course for ever, and when: "Death itself [started] working backwards"  
C.S. Lewis: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe; ch. 15  
 It was The Morning That Death Was Killed; as Steve Turner, the Christian poet, expresses it so simply yet eloquently in his poem of the same name.

I woke in a place that was dark  
 The air was spicy and still  
 I was bandaged from head to foot  
 The morning that death was killed

Mary, she came there to find me  
 Peter with wonder was filled  
 And John came running and jumping  
 The morning that death was killed

I rose from a mattress of stone  
 I folded my clothes on the sill  
 I heard the door rolling open  
 The morning that death was killed

My friends were lost in amazement  
 My Father I knew was thrilled  
 Things were never the same again  
 After the morning that death was killed

I walked alone in the garden  
 The birds in the branches trilled  
 It felt like a new beginning  
 The morning that death was killed

Poem © Steve Turner