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The painful path of redemption



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When we desire resurrected, redeemed life, then we could do worse than choosing Mary Magdalene as our spiritual director. We often speak and sing of the resurrection as something accomplished, as a finished product. We have a problem. None of us has a finished, completed life to show for our efforts.

We dream resurrected and redeemed life: of friendships that are reawakened to life after a long winter dormancy; of the resuscitation of old love stories that have long been lost, of peace that sets an end to war, of a table of plenty that follows a famine, of health that replaces illness and of freedom that triumphs over suppression.

Indeed, this life is fulfilled for Jesus, but not for us. On our side of the grave the promise of this life is much as it was for Mary Magdalene in the garden: neither fully completed nor a mere hope for a distant future. Mary Magdalene is a Spirit Master of the process of resurrection, because she alone if willing to go through all the processes, takes no short cuts and aborts none of the paths to be travelled (unlike the disciples, who simply give up and go home after round one). She says to us: This life is not an object to be owned, but a process to be undergone, a process which must unfold in us through the power of God. This is important so that Easter does not end up being an intermission on the steady path to desperation.

Our lives are painfully incomplete and filled with gaps. Only those who take their own experience seriously will understand the deepest reason for the death of Jesus: An authentic love, that desires to redeem something, must be prepared to struggle for that which it loves. We are not going to put our heart into anything that we do not desire to redeem.

In Mary Magdalene we see the readiness to struggle for that which have grown to love: Getting up early, wandering through the darkness, heading back to the start, discussing the situation with others, standing on the outside, weeping, staring into emptiness, being questioned, turning away from darkness and narrowness toward light and breadth, from graves to gardens, and being questioned again, growing into recognition, and letting ago anew.

In God we see this readiness to struggle for that which he loves. The key question is: For what or for whom is it worthwhile to struggle? God answers this key question of love, and we are the answer. We are what he deem worthwhile to struggle for. This is the eternal message of the Stories of God. They show us a God who is ready to pour his heart out for us, the people he truly loves. They demonstrate a God willing to struggle for us and with us. If it were not so, then he would not need to split the Red Sea and to take on military powers. If it were not so, then there is no need for him to let carbohydrates rain from heaven. Then the rocks and continue to stubbornly and mutely withhold water and leave thirsting humans to whimper before them. If God did not struggle for us, the first garden story of Adam and Eve would have been the last, and the garden story of Jesus and Mary Magdalene would never have occurred.

That is what a redeeming love looks like. Redemption is just another word for the wideness, the breadth that God grants to all those who dwell in places too narrow, who have no room to breathe or manoeuver, and whose life is at stake. When we say that we take part in the work of redemption, then only we are willing to struggle for the life of the world in order that it might know that spaciousness of God.

The path of Jesus, the path of the Gospels, the path of the resurrection, are the paths of struggle. Struggle will enable us to see again. And what we will see, is what we truly love. We will see what is worth struggling for. We will see what is truly important to our hearts, what power really is within us. Just ask Mary Magdalene. There are some things that can only be seen by eyes that have wept.

Normally, such grand stories end with: To be continued. But this is the day that the Lord has made. And in this story of God the story concludes with: The continuation is already running.

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