

Readings: Acts 10:34-43, Ps 118:1-2,14-24, 1 Cor 15:1-11, Jn 20:1-18

Equality not Favouritism

Introduction

There are two kinds of grace that I have received in my life, two kinds of grace that I will never forget, as a human being and as a Christian minister. The first is the story of the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ through Mary Magdalene. The second is the story of the grace of God revealed in the first Australian missionary to Korea. Let me talk a little about each!

1. God's Grace through Mary Magdalene

We remember that Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross.
And that He rose after 3 days from death, to give us eternal life.
Today, on Easter morning, we are here to celebrate that grace: his resurrection.

According to John's Gospel, Jesus showed his body to Mary Magdalene first. There is great significance, great meaning in the story in this point of who first receives the Good News, because it tells us something about the character of Resurrection, its meaning, its value.

Let us digress for moment in order to register the point! Think for a moment and ask the question, who would you consider inviting to a very special, or unique event? Moreover, what would it say about that event? At the seasonal opening ceremony of professional baseball in South Korea, an American adoptee was chosen not long ago to throw the first ball, and he was an amputee, a child with no legs. In the Olympics, we find the same thing: the torch-bearer selected, is always someone who conveys a particular meaning, symbolic message. The one who opens the baseball season in Korea, the one who opens games every four years, furnishes basic, foundational meaning to the events.

If so, what symbolic message does the Lord deliver on this day of resurrection when he appears to Mary Magdalene, and only to Mary Magdalene? Let's think a little!

Mary is mentioned in Luke Chapter 8, as a woman who was possessed by seven demons; and who Jesus liberates from her possession. There is also a claim in Luke 7, that Mary Magdalene is the woman who was a sinner who poured ointment on Jesus' feet. And here we find, unique to John's account, that Jesus, the risen Jesus, reveals himself first and only to her

The truth is that she was one of a marginalized group of people; a group of no social weight to speak of...indeed quite the opposite. But – and this is the glaring point – that the Lord chose to show his glorious resurrected body to her, uniquely to her.

The same sort of idea is evident in Paul's writings as well. Paul was the outsider, the apostle who carried no status, no weight, because he had never known Jesus "in the flesh", in real life, as had the others. But, he remarks, in his Letter to the Church in Corinth, "Jesus appeared also to me – even though I am like someone whose birth was abnormal" (1 Cor 15:8, TEV).

This idea of a God who has no favourites, no preference – confirms what we hear today in the reading from the Book of the Acts, as Peter gets a ‘wake-up call’: a call that to his credit he recognizes, but then later forgets in his conflict with Paul. But, at least, he initially got it: “I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”

Yes, Jesus Christ did not die only for certain people, but for all and every human being. And Jesus Christ, was raised from death, as the sign of God’s love for us, each and all of us, and solidarity with us.

We are all one, just one family under and in the salvation of God. And so, we must always remember the grace and salvation of God and know that God loves us all equally.

God’s Grace through the Rev. Joseph Henry Davies

The other grace that I have received, is that of an Australian missionary His name was Joseph Henry Davies, and he went to Korea in 1889, 129 years ago. He was ordained and commissioned from the Scots’ Church in Melbourne. He spent five months in Seoul, Korea, studying the Korean language, then spent 20 days walking to the Busan area, south of Seoul, where he was planning to work with his sister Mary. That never happened: he contracted smallpox and pneumonia on that journey, and died the day after he arrived in Busan, aged just 33 years. His body was buried in Busan.

On his grave are the words, “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.” (Phil 1:21) Davis' death served as the new starting point of mission in Korea by Australian churches. It was not in vain His death led to a resurrected effort in mission and evangelism.

Davies' nephew Margaret and his sister-in-law, Ellis also continued his wishes and passion for Korea for 30 years until they were deported from Korea by the Japanese, who seized Korea for a time, as part of their then rising empire. Although he spent a very short time, only 6 months in Korea, Davis’ passion, dedication and love, became a seed of the gospel in a land that had never known *this* God of love and compassion. Since his death, 126 Australian missionaries have worked in Korea.

Davies’ mission in Korea was never accomplished. But his vision, his enthusiasm and sacrifice, raised the Korean church.

Conclusion: The Value of God’s Equality

Mary was a woman who was a sinner, an outsider, despised and rejected. However, she was the one, the only one, who witnessed the body of Jesus’ glorious resurrection, immediately after the event. Davies – on the face of it – an unsuccessful missionary of no standing, came to life in the people of Korea. Both, both these people had an abiding love for Jesus.

This is the faith and surprise of Christ’s resurrection. Life comes to full expression among the most unexpected people, among the most insignificant people. The Resurrection of Jesus shows us that the carpenter of Galilee, the sinners, disabled friends and even so-called unsuccessful pastors or missionaries are more holy than the priests of Jerusalem or religious leaders at the temple who connived at the death of the innocent Jesus die on the cross, to keep their position.

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."
Today, I invite you to see the Lord Jesus Christ and to proclaim, "*I have seen the Lord, and Jesus love us all equally.*"

Amen