



Voices from the margins:

Women of the Passion

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Anointed.

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. *John 12:3*

*You risked it all in a moment of emotion
charged with an energy that heightened the senses
as perfumed hands, feet, and hair, mingled for a time.
Physical touch, in kindness, sorrow and love.
Knowing somehow another chance would not come.*

In the home at Bethany. A Hearth. A Haven. The events of the last weeks of Jesus' earthly life are cast. A place, we presume, he knew well. We are told of some who were there. Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Judas, Jesus. From a distance we could see it as a time of preparation or planning. Perhaps. As we prepare in Lent to enter into the drama of Holy Week it feels like a pause button has been pressed on the road to Jerusalem for this moment of retreat and tenderness. Maybe it would be gentler to call it a time of shared food and shared close company. It seems as though this was a private moment for just the closest disciples. Moments of companionship on a road that was to become, difficult. Into that space Mary offers an extravagance. Judas says it is a crime against the backdrop of poverty. Jesus says different and adds a prophetic word there will always be those who are poor. We will all have our own ideas of what should be "sold to pay for the poor." It is the generous act of radical hospitality that takes the centre stage as the house is filled with the scent of perfume. Sorrow and love flow mingled down. We raise a mirror here to the narrative of the crucifixion and watch the supreme generous outpouring of charged emotion.

What would we give? Or would we, like Judas, scorn the radical generosity and claim the thirty pieces of silver. But as we all know silver does not last. To frame this as a transaction makes little sense. Even the thief to one side of Jesus recognised in the crucifixion the act of revelation. We can turn the mirror to our own times. Amidst the violence and turbulent scenes there are stories of sorrow and love come mingled down for a time. It is truly

heartbreaking to watch and to know we can do little more than be witness to these things. Returning to Bethany, to Mary, pause button firmly pressed. She anoints Jesus' feet with all that she had.

Questioning.

Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him." *Luke 22:56*

*Hidden in the half light and shadows,
were you desperately seeking the truth
with a piercing gaze over firelight?
When the courage to speak out was
rewarded with a betrayal of the truth.*

In the courtyard of the high priest a crowd has gathered. Jesus has been taken there for questioning. We must presume it is a semi-public space, though John tells us there is a woman guarding the gate. According to John it is she who questions Peter. A fire is lit and people are sat around it. We do not know the name of the servant-girl or the woman at the gate. Who were they? We might presume servants to the High Priest. More importantly, what did they want in questioning Peter? They are almost forgotten as a bit-part in the saga of Peter denying Jesus. But I wonder about them and about all those who are frightened into the shadows, trying to find the right moment to ask the important question. In John's account Peter is only allowed in when another disciple, known to the High Priest, speaks to the woman on the door. When he does enter she asks him about Jesus. Though the poetry of Luke's account in the firelight is appealing, the drama of John's account adds mystery. These encounters are easy to miss amid the dramatic arrest. Is it possible these women actually wanted to hear the truth about Jesus? Yet they are dismissed.

Weeping.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” *Luke 23:28*

*Anguished tears flow
for a moment passing by
for the loss, pain and a fear that
grips like cords tightening
deep in the soul
longing for another turning.*

Who are they, these Daughters of Jerusalem? ‘Weep for yourselves and for your children.’ Jesus’ response to them traditionally associated with the coming destruction of the Temple and the fall of the Roman Empire. But who are they?

Perhaps they followed and remained faithful where others betrayed and fled. Perhaps they provided hospitality, a home, then unexpectedly on the road to the cross became witness to the events. Who are these women today? The daughters of Jerusalem continue to weep for themselves and for their children. “We, Palestinian and Israeli women from all walks of life, are united in the human desire for a future of peace, freedom, equality, rights, and security for our children and the next generations. We believe that the majority of the people of our nations also share our mutual desire. Therefore, we demand that our leaders listen to our call and promptly begin peace talks and negotiations, with a determined commitment to achieving a political solution to the long and painful conflict, within a limited timeframe. We call on the peoples of both nations – Palestinian and Israeli, and peoples of the region to join our call and demonstrate their support for the resolution of the conflict. We call on the women of the world to stand by us for a future of peace and security, prosperity, dignity and freedom for ourselves, our children, and the people of the region. We call on people of peace from around the world, to add their voices to our call.”

*Quote from “Women Wage Peace”
the largest grassroots peace movement in Israel today.*

Enduring

“Woman, here is your son.” *John 19:26*

*You, there at the beginning,
now at the ending.*

*The sword of sorrow
promised for your heart
has pierced your soul.*

*In silent loyal vigil receiving
a taste of the bitter cup.*

*With gritted teeth
'according to your word'
comfort to another's son.*

‘According to your word.’ The word of the other, to whose authority, or influence; wishing life were different and sometimes through gritted teeth we say ‘if you say so.’ Let it be to me according to your word. This is the story of Mary Mother of Jesus and ubiquitous synonym for mothers whose children cause them to worry and first amongst all those biblical women named and unnamed, faithful and ever-present when the men had long fled. The story of Mary her pain and suffering unfolds itself. We see her clothed in blue, the sanitised sanctified image of a virgin, perfect, undefiled. Yet women find themselves pregnant on the wrong side of a border, in a refugee camp with few supplies and a distant medical centre. If only Mary had the correct papers, documents or passport. I see Mary in those around us. The young woman who worked 105 hours a week caring for others to support her daughter and her husband, and to pay his child support allowance. Mary, frustrated by her own medical condition. Mary, reliant on meagre transport; living too far from the job she dare not give up. Mary, a woman who at every turn finds another ‘no-room at the inn’ so desperate she has to beg her way to a night in a bed. Mary, who can’t afford to allow others to help in case they take away what little she has. Dignity. Respect. Mary, too frightened to ask for the knowledge she was never taught.

Nothing much changes. The fear, the un-knowing, into the hands of another. Mary, servant. How did she cope? Giving up all she had as servant. 'Surely from now on all generations shall call me blessed'. Do we continue with the magnificat? "To scatter the proud in the imaginations of their hearts. To bring down the powerful from their thrones, and lift up the lowly; To fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty."

Witness

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. *Mark 15:40*

*Huddled together
against the jeering and
mocking of the condemned,
distant but engaged still.
You who once sustained now resigned,
not powerless but waiting,
where others deserted,
the faithful remnant.*

Named and known. These women too are disciples and we know more of them in these short verses than some of those hallowed amidst the twelve. Named here and following at a distance, faithful whilst others chose to run. We look on at a distance of time. After all the years between us and the happenings of the biblical times there is still distance between us, still, not seeing the whole picture despite years of thought and reflection. We too are distant but engaged in a continued witness in so many places still where violence and the threat of violence is never far away. Where do we choose to stand as witness today? Who do we invite to stand with us? Will we stand with Molly and Sally as they protest to the threatened violence of nuclear arms and are ultimately 'put away' for breaching the peace (aka Eucharist

and sitting silently on the road). Will we stand with Jan and the Ecumenical Accompanier programme as witness in Palestine alongside those who wait with dignity in a place designed to humiliate as nervous soldiers create a barrier between Palestinian, tourist and Israeli. Separation, distance. Time to close the gap.

You can read the stories of Molly, Sally and the Ecumenical Accompaniers in: 'Standing on our Stories' Narrated by Susan Dale published by Wild Goose

Preparing.

The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. *Luke 23:55*

*Still you follow, unwavering.
Quietly you defy authority watching,
waiting for the right moment,
for swords have no power here.
Your peaceful action, begins
the silent revolution-echo
through the centuries. Keep watch.*

Dawning.

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. *Mark 16:2*

*You return expectant,
of nothing more than the task
of loving service to anoint the departed.
You who have been there through it all,
now in the final moment as the earth turns to
the sun in the quietness of the morning after.
Suddenly unprepared;*



Ardal Weinidogaeth
Bro Gwydyr
Ministry Area