

I never did see the hydra. Not the many-headed monster of Greek mythology, or the constellation of the southern sky. Just the simple tubular invertebrate in freshman zoology. I had seen the picture in the textbook; heard it described by the lab assistant. She said we'd see it turning cartwheels through the drop of water on the slide under our microscopes. I really wanted to see that!

I tried long and hard, adjusting and readjusting the focus on the microscope. I never saw a thing. When I finally worked up the courage to ask for help, the teacher looked through my scope and said with disgust, "Well, the water's dried up now. Whatever was there is dead." If only . . . If only she'd come 'round sooner. If only I'd swallowed my pride sooner and asked for help.

To see what is right in front of us is not always a simple matter. Past experience does sometimes help. As when we arrive home at the rectory to find the kitchen trash strewn through the house, the garbage bag ripped open, litter—always coffee grounds!—everywhere. We know what's happened. Someone forgot to latch the trash door. And though we have two dogs, we have no doubt which one pushed the drawer open and dragged out the irresistible loot within. Nothing new here. The only surprise is that it's happened again!

But to come to a place expecting to see one thing and discover there something altogether unexpected, as happened to Mary Magdalene, that is disturbing in a very different way.

Jesus had been buried in a garden tomb in the place where he was crucified. Carrying grim images still fresh from two days before, Mary Magdalene returned to the place early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark. She came alone, empty handed. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had already anointed his body, with 100 pounds of spices—a royal burial. Mary came only to be near what was left of her teacher and Lord, whom she loved. If she thought to see him at all, it was only in memory.

But what is this? The stone had been removed from the tomb! Mary "saw" that the body must be gone, that something must be done. She ran for help to Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them what she'd seen: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Tragedy on top of tragedy.

But now, what is this? Peter and the other disciples raced each other to the tomb. He beat Peter out, looked in, and then they did a little dance outside, and he let Peter go in first. Peter looked around, saw the linen wrappings still there (no body—they unwrapped it before taking it away?) Then the other came in, "saw and believed." Just what he believed at that point is unclear, "for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead."

And then? Well, then the two disciples went home, without saying a word, or nothing worth remembering, to Mary or each other, or to anyone else when they got there. This begins to look a lot more like comedy than tragedy.

But not to Mary. To her things looked even worse now than she could have imagined; Peter and the other disciple were no help at all. What was she to do? Weeping, she bent over and looked into the tomb herself. Was she seeing things? Angels! And they were asking a nonsensical question, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She gave the only obvious answer, and then turned back, away from the tomb. No help there, either.

Good move. Because who should be standing there now but the one she thinks she’s lost, who’s been stolen away. But this is a comedy, a romance; so, while *he* knows *her*, *she* doesn’t recognize *him*. She supposes him to be the gardener. He *looks* like he’s in charge of the place. And he is, both: the gardener, and in charge.

This is the first day of the week. On the Friday, the sixth day, the day on which the Lord God had created humankind in his image, Jesus had died, for the life of the world. On the seventh day, the Sabbath, he had rested in the tomb. Now begins a new day, the *eighth* day of creation, the day of resurrection, God’s new beginning with humankind.

Here, at last, stands the one who can help, the one who was “in the beginning,” through whom all things were made. He *is* the gardener, he *is* in charge; he has come to the garden to meet Mary, as the Lord God came to walk with Adam and Eve in Eden.

But this is no time to dally or to try to hold on. Things are moving fast. What Mary has seen with the aid of their teacher, the one who helped all of them to see when he was with them, she must go now and tell the others: “I have seen the Lord.” Before the day is out, they will see him, too, all except Thomas. But that’s a story for next Sunday.

The community in and for whom the Gospel of John was written was very sure, sure of what they saw and what they knew in Jesus. What they saw was truth, and they knew that it was so. Those who did not see as they did were in the dark. The Gospel of John’s label for those who did not see and believe in Jesus is “the Jews.” We heard that label a lot in the reading of the Passion, both on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. By the time John was written, the Jewish Christians had separated from the synagogues, and were quite bitter toward other Jews who did not believe as they did.

But, whether or not the gospel writer intended it, at the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene, Peter and the other disciple look surprisingly like “the Jews.” Not hostile to Jesus, of course, but certainly confused, not seeing or believing with any clarity. Not until Jesus made himself known to them, to Mary in the garden, to the others hiding together in Jerusalem. There is a caution for us here—we can’t be so sure of ourselves,

after all, when others hold truth differently, do not see eye to eye with us. There may be more going on than meets the eye, something new and unexpected coming to light, or something that will always remain hidden from our sight in this world. So, if we cringe on hearing “the Jews” in John, we might also ask ourselves whom *we* define as “the Jews” in our own time—people we reject and scorn because they do not see as we see.

Revelation, coming to see with new, deeper sight, takes time and attention, it seems. Not even Jesus’ closest disciples and friends realized right away or on their own that he had been raised, as he had said. Understanding came gradually, as John illustrates so beautifully in the story of Mary Magdalene and Jesus at the garden tomb. With understanding came responsibility, too— responsibility to share both in word and in manner of life the news of what we have seen, just as much as we have seen so far—and to hear what/how others see.

“If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,” advises the letter to the Colossians. Not *ignoring* the needs and concerns of the world, but having died and been raised with Christ, learning to see those needs and concerns as if with his eyes. Those eyes looked on everything with compassion and love, without flinching, on all the darkness and pain of the world.

Today is the first day of the week, the eighth day of creation, a new day, a day to begin again with Christ. A good day to begin again to see with new eyes, to see and be part of Christ’s resurrected life in this world.

We have not had far to look here, in and through our friend John-Bosco. John was in this country for 18 months spending a year or so among us. He came to this country as a refugee from Burundi. He had been threatened with death there and feared for his own safety and the safety of his family, who were still in Burundi. John sought asylum in the U.S... Asylum was denied. He was downcast. His friends were distraught. There was talk of an appeal, with better documentation. It was a sad and scary time.

One day, though, John-Bosco came in radiant, at peace. He had come to a decision. The men who had threatened his life were in prison; there was a new government. More importantly, he had come to see with new eyes: God had brought him here in preparation for his returning to Burundi, not to stay. It was hard for us, his new community of friends, to see this when he first told us. We were afraid for him. But in time, we, too, came to see and believe with him.

He has gone home, to his family and community in Burundi. He has been there for one month, today. With the support of many new friends at Redeemer and elsewhere, he has started his project to bring about reconciliation among his people and to help reduce poverty and hunger in Burundi. (You can see and read about the project on the web site www.hopeforburundi.org .)

To see this is to see with new eyes, to see with the eyes of Christ the hope of resurrection. To come to see and be part of the new thing God is doing, not only in Burundi, but all around us, this is resurrection life. Today is the first day of the week, the eighth day of creation, the day of resurrection. Seen with the eyes of Christ, so, also is tomorrow, and the day after and the day after . . .

Alleluia! Christ is risen!