I Have Seen the Lord

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I HAVE SEEN THE LORD

BY LEE MAGNESS

A choral reading for Resurrection morning, incorporating John 20:1-18 and the experience of Mary of Magdala into reflections on the meaning of the resurrection. Reader 1 tells the scriptural story, Reader 2 is the poetic commentator, and Reader 3 speaks for Mary.

1 Early
2 cow-milking early,
   rooster-crowing early,
   earlier-than-the-crack-of-dawn early

1 on the first day of the week
2 first in sequence but not in significance
   (until this one)
   the day after Sabbath (until this one)

1 while it was still dark
2 darkest-just-before-dawn dark,
   bleary-eyed, teary-eyed dark,
   sky-dark, tomb-dark, soul-dark dark

1 Mary of Magdala went to the tomb
2 possessed-and-purified-of-the-seven-demons,
   faithful-and-following-and-funding-his-forays,
   last at the hurry-before-Sabbath-sundown tomb,
   first at the Sabbath's-over tomb

1 and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.
2 the heavier-than-her-stony-heart stone,
   the bitterer-than-gall stone
   the who-will-roll-away-the-stone? stone

1 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple,
   the one Jesus loved, and said,
3 They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him.

1 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.
   Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.
   He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.
   Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb.
   He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head.
   The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.
   Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside.
   He saw and believed.
   (They still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)
   Then the disciples went back to their homes
2 running, reporting, running, outrunning,
   reaching,
   bending over, peeking in, brushing past, going in,
   seeing, not seeing, seeing, believing,
   believing but not understanding,
   believing that Mary was they-have-taken-the-Lord right,
   but not understanding that he had risen from the dead.

1 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying.
2 crying her soft, sob-less, tear-less tears,
   from her cried-out, sightless eyes

1 As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb
   and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been,
   one at the head and the other at the foot.
   They asked her, Woman, why are you crying?
3 They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they have put him.

2 so stunned by the unseen, so focused on what she cannot find, that she isn’t even stunned to be seeing things, seeing now—I’ve-seen-it-all things, seeing angels of all things, carrying on with angels, carrying on conversations with angels, still all empty-tomb, empty-eye unbelieving.

1 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

2 seeing, they will not see—seeing the one she had studied and stared at, whose face and form she had scanned and surveyed in long-light and lamp-light, in moon-light and noon-light—seeing, they will not see

1 Woman, he said, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?

2 no more where? or when? or how? now, who?

no more who-has-taken? now, who-are-you-looking-for?

no more cross-eyed, tomb-eyed, stony-eyed, empty-eyed woman, now, Woman, who are you looking for?

1 Thinking he was the gardener, she said, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.

2 blind to the one who had given her sight, blaming the one who had taken her blame, but asking no explanation, wanting only him.

1 Jesus said to her, Mary.

2 the commonest of all names as if uttered for the first time,

the most familiar of names as if invented for the moment, the name which identified her, suddenly, strangely, the name by which she identified him

1 She turned to him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni!

2 (which means Teacher).

1 still teaching, still reaching, with the name of her heart, with the language of her heart, and her she-who-has-ears-to-hear ears, lifting the lids of her pierced eyes, and loosing the lips of her pursed mouth

1 Jesus said, Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.

2 she had gained him once by letting him go, and must now again, as if his going to God gave him to her, his divine show-and-tell entrusted to her—

1 So Mary of Magdala went to the disciples with the news:

2 I have seen the Lord! no more they-have-taken-the-Lord, no more we-don’t-know-where-they-have-put-the-Lord, now, I have seen the Lord, I have heard, held, seen the Lord.

3 I have seen the Lord!

23 I have seen the Lord!