

Four reflections for Holy Week & Easter

# that week

DEBORAH FIELDING

**PRAYMK**



one

## thursday

After sitting for a few moments, the meal finished, Peter gets up to help clear the table. On his way out to the kitchen with a stack of dishes he notices the towel that Jesus had used. It is still wet as he picks it up and lays it over his shoulder. The smell of soap and damp reaches his nostrils and a welter of shame rocks him on his feet. Sweat clusters on his hairline and a shiver rides down his back. He doesn't understand anymore than he did before Jesus washed his feet, but what he does understand is that he should've kept his mouth shut like everyone else. Maybe they were silent out of astonishment or fear or something but they were better off. He wonders if he'll ever get it right. What an idiot he'd made of himself.

So now he's helping with the clearing up. He hits his massive shoulder on the wall on his way through the door and the dishes clatter in his hands. But he doesn't drop them; he makes it through and down the stairs without breaking them. A sigh of relief greets Mary as she takes them from him. She smiles at him and he feels even more of a fool, but in the midst of his growl he realises that she's not really laughing at him.

'At least you say when you don't understand,' she says. She reaches for the towel, but he jerks his shoulder away automatically. 'It's not sacred,' says Mary.

'No,' says Peter. 'Of course not.' But between one room and the next the towel had seemed to become holy or special. He laughs abruptly and shoves it at Mary. A sacred towel?! But then he watches Mary as she turns away and wonders what will be left when Jesus' gone wherever he's going. Peter has a sudden urge to run after Mary to ask her. But he slaps himself on the head instead and goes back to join the others.

John gets up abruptly from the table, leaves the room and paces outside for a few minutes. Judas has gone and he must've gone quickly because John can't hear any sign of him. John is so angry that he cannot think in straight lines. He can

only see a jumble of red and black in front of his eyes. He can only hear the words spoken and remember the bread dipping into the dish and the two hands that shared it. Jesus' hand and Judas'. Judas who was his friend. Who he had walked with and talked with. John stops pacing - has he misunderstood? He was so used to misunderstanding, but he wasn't like Peter - at least Pete was able to get stuff out in the open. But this? He can't tell anyone about this - what if it was a mistake? Perhaps Judas has gone to get some more bread or wine.

Peter comes outside to join him. 'What's going on?' he says.

'Oh it's hot in there. I...Peter, what are we meant to do? Can't we do something?'

'I don't know,' Peter touches his arm. 'Come back inside and finish eating.'

Peter passes the cup to John and John to James. James feels like a child watching a play he doesn't understand. He daren't look too much at his brother. He passes the cup to Philip and feels like he might have just made a promise or agreed to something without sufficient information. He wants to take the cup back from Philip.

Philip thinks that yes, he understands symbols, but how is this wine, Jesus' blood? He almost splutters as he takes a sip.

Thomas is still wondering how he can follow Jesus if he doesn't know the way and he takes a gulp without thinking much about it.

John watches the others drink and he looks forward to when he can go.

Peter is scorching with rage and his hands are fisting in his lap. Deny him? He asks in silence. Disown him? His throat aches. But he's mine. Peter gets up and stumbles on his way out of the room.

two

## friday

John looks up and he can't really trust what he is seeing. He feels sick, he feels blind – he can't breathe. He looks down again so all he can see is the bit of dirty, dusty ground in front of his feet. The sight of his feet gives him a kind of horrid reassurance that he at least is real. He studies the smudge of black dirt in between his second and third toes and focuses on it for a moment before he looks up again. He looks at the sky, the dark grey sky with no break in it. John wonders where the light is coming from before he realises that actually there is very little light apart from the torches of the soldiers. Soldiers? John never thought it would come to soldiers. He swallows with difficulty, and then feels a hack of shame, what does his thirst matter?

Finally John forces himself to look up. He puts his hands on his hips and squints at first. But his friend looks...yes, hurting and hugely sorrowful, but he still looks the same as he always has. He's hanging like the other two, but he looks...bigger than them. John can't explain it. He looks and looking becomes slightly easier.

One of the other two heaves himself up on the nail that bites into his ankles, lifts his chest up and splutters something. The veins in his neck show, in a hot, angry relief against his dirty skin. He yells at Jesus and spits, tears of rage on his face.

'Do something,' he yells. He takes an agonised breath. 'Do something, if you can.' The man falls back and his weights pull him down again.

And then the other man shouts out with a sound that hits John's ears like a blow to the chin. 'We're guilty,' he says. The man grits his teeth, his throat grappling and thrutching. He takes a breath. 'He's not.'

The other spits again. John catches his eye for a moment – and once again he feels sick with terror.

Jesus doesn't speak.

John sees the second man look at Jesus with pleading, he tries to speak.

He wrenches his neck towards Jesus, he writhes, he gestures with his bleeding fingers. 'Take me with you,' he says finally.

Jesus nods his head, 'yes,' and takes a long, difficult breath. He looks at the man the way he always looks at people and he says, 'yes, you can come.'

And then Jesus looks at John, the thorns gnawing into his forehead and he says, 'here is your mother.'

John blinks, tears and sweat stinging his eyes. And he looks around him. He hadn't noticed before but Jesus' mother is standing beside him. He stops thinking and puts his arm around her. He lays his chin for a moment on the top of her head. Mary looks up at him and he can hardly bear the look in her eyes. But he does bear it and he doesn't let her out of his sight.

When the sky goes black and chaos thumps into them, John takes Mary's hand and leads her back to his house.

John finds it difficult to speak on the way home, he feels like a father with his daughter's hand. Although he knows the way back in the dark, everything he looks on is wrong, deformed. Nothing looks quite familiar. Even his front door he has to look at twice. Stumbling inside, he lights a lamp.

For a few moments the two look about them and don't speak.

'Are you hungry?' John says to Mary at last. 'Thirsty?' He scratches his head and tries to remember if there is anything in the house.

Mary looks up at him in confusion. 'No...' she looks down. But then she sets her jaw and says, 'yes. Yes we should have something.'

When she smells the wine, Mary feels a surge of nausea go through her stomach. But she knows that one should eat and drink, so she sits down with John and she eats. It feels as if the action of eating is one she has never carried out before. The bread grazes her throat and the wine stings her tongue. She tries to smile at John, though.

He isn't looking at her, but over her shoulder. She follows his gaze and realises that he's not looking at the wall but at something else entirely. She is jealous, suddenly, of the memories that John has. The ones that she cannot share - of talks and journeys and meals. But then she feels ashamed. She carefully pulls from their safe place her own memories of her son. She looks at the one of the angel, the one of his first movement inside her. The one of dear Joseph and the crib. Of that old man and woman at the temple when she felt such a child. Of the times he laughed and played with her. The first time he spoke. The first time he smiled. She looks at the memory of Elizabeth and Zechariah. She tries to cheer herself with thoughts of them and of Joseph but then she thinks of the hill and the blood and the dirt and dark. She looks at John as the tears come to her eyes.

'What shall we do?' he says. He looks at her and as he does, he becomes the child.

Mary cannot speak but she reaches out her hands over the table and places them on his.

three

## saturday

Martha, Mary and Lazarus look at one another. None of them have spoken since they got home. Mary sits with her hands fidgeting in her lap. Lazarus lies on the floor with his knuckles drumming gently on his chest. Martha sits on her hands and lets her feet swing quietly underneath her. Their friends are upstairs going over and over the arrest and what would happen and what he said and what they said. The three siblings though, have taken refuge in one of the bedrooms. Having lived together into adulthood the three have remained very close. Martha looks at her brother and sister and it strikes her how little they have changed since childhood.

Her brother is a wonder to her, his cheeks still puff in and out as he thinks and remembers. Her sister is uncharacteristically pale, but as motionless as she always is and in a world of her own. Martha stops swinging her feet and puts them softly on the ground.

‘Do you think I ought to prepare something? Get something ready for tomorrow?’ She taps her toe up and down.

Nobody responds.

‘Well, I can’t make anything tomorrow and we should have something in case anyone gets hungry.’

‘Are you hungry?’ says Lazarus.

‘No, no. Not now, but shouldn’t I make something for tomorrow? Lazarus looks up at the ceiling and Mary stares off at the wall.

‘Mary?’

Mary blinks and then looks at her sister as if she’s just woken up from a dream.

Martha gets up from her chair and goes to the kitchen.

As she lies in bed that night, Mary hears the men upstairs talking for hours. She can’t hear distinct words, but there is a general rumble of discussion and the odd voice rising in anger or frustration. Mary feels as if she hasn’t left the house for weeks instead of hours. She turns from her left side onto her right and then onto her back. She didn’t see what happened in Jerusalem, but she can’t help imagining it. She looks at the benign ceiling and at her familiar things and she tries to drag reassurance from them. She thinks of the first time she met Jesus.

She knows what she was wearing and where she was. She remembers what he said and how she listened. It is as if the moment exists outside of real time: more

than a memory. Mary thinks of the time before. They weren't a perfect family, but happy. And they aren't close to perfect now. But when she met Jesus, Mary felt as if a curtain had been drawn between childhood and womanhood. It was a colossal change that seemed very natural and gentle. He was suddenly a part of their family and she loved him.

Mary thinks, as the tears rest in the hollows of her collarbones, of women she knows who have lost their husbands. She can think of old women with a kind of resignation in their faces. She thinks of one woman she knows whose husband died very young – she remembers the sound of her tears, the shock – as if her whole self was being torn apart. Mary isn't married, though. She squeezes her eyes shut in shame. She wasn't his wife.

Lazarus is awake early the next day. It's still dark when he dresses and makes his way outside. He takes a cloak from the back of one of the chairs and wraps it about him as he settles to see the sunrise. To see if the sun will rise. He sits for perhaps half an hour before he sees some wands of grey and pink on the horizon. He gazes at the dawn and is stunned for a moment.

'Do you know where they've taken him?' Martha startles him.

Lazarus sighs, 'No, um...yes...Andrew said something about a tomb. Joseph's tomb.'

'Do you know where it is?' She is leaning on the door frame.

'No, Martha,' Lazarus shouts. He wraps the cloak tighter around himself and turns his head away from her. 'I don't know. I don't know what to do. Go and ask the others.' He leans his head on his forearms.

'Peter's not here, nor John.'

'Peter is here, he came in late last night. I expect you were asleep.' 'All right, I was only asking.'

Lazarus turns and reaches out his hand to touch hers.

'Don't worry,' says Martha and she pulls away, turning back into the house.

Lazarus thumps his fist onto his forehead and grits his teeth. After a few minutes he gets up and follows Martha inside.

He sees her sitting at the table in the murky kitchen. He watches her for a moment before going to her and laying his hand on her shoulder.

'And I can't even work today,' she says. She looks around her, 'it's so quiet.'

Lazarus doesn't speak.

She looks up at him, 'and so many people are having just an ordinary Saturday. And they don't care. Or they don't know.' She looks down at the table. 'They don't even know,' she says quietly.

four

## sunday

Mary Magdalene is sick of sitting at home, her head is aching, her back is aching, her eyes sting with lack of sleep. It's still dark, everyone is asleep. After hours of waiting and what felt like imprisonment, Mary rushes out of the house and runs towards the tomb that they left on Friday evening. In between, the Sabbath seemed like a cheat, a hollow day, a long stretched out, hellish day.

When she gets to the tomb she looks and stamps her foot – it's the wrong tomb, this one's empty. She's not surprised; she's been almost blind for the last two days. She turns as the sun is rising and she looks upon things that she recognises. There is the spot where she and Mary sat, where Joanna stood, where Joseph stumbled with the body. It is the right place. Then where have they put him? Mary runs to the entrance and stops before looking inside. She hasn't seen many tombs.

There's no one there.

Anger, fear, sorrow, pain, hurt and loneliness suspended for the past hours crowd Mary's body and she is unable to move. Thick, dark, purple sobs wrench through her and she has to lean on the tomb wall to stop herself from falling over. Inside now, she sees two men who weren't there before. She wipes her eyes. They're all white.

One of them asks her why she's crying and she doesn't understand. She's afraid and she says, 'they've taken him, where have they put him?'

She feels herself turning, but still with one hand on the wall. There's a man in the garden and he asks why she's crying.

'Mary,' he says. She looks at him and through her tears finally she begins to see. She can see him. She rushes to him and sinks into his arms.

It's quiet. A morning of still quiet loveliness. Mary gasps as she sees the new sun rest on the street. In stillness and quiet she walks past familiar houses, olive trees she's known for years, avoids familiar cracks in the road. It's a morning like any other. A morning that she recognises. She remembers mornings like this from when she was little. A morning of clean shadows and only the odd shuffle of feet on the ground. The sweet still of the early morning. Many people are still asleep.

This is the day. The first day of first days. Mary's had lots of first days. But this, This, is the First Day. There is a slight breeze and she can feel it under her hands and in her hair. There is a sweet breeze inside her as well. Inside her head and her chest. A clean, fresh song in her insides. She runs, her feet cool on the dry new road. He'd said her name.



That Week by Deborah Fielding Published by PrayMK

29 Bradwell Rd, Bradville, Milton Keynes, MK13 7AX  
[www.praymk.com](http://www.praymk.com)

© 2020 Deborah Fielding  
First published 2016 by [proost.co.uk](http://proost.co.uk)

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except as permitted by U.K. copyright law.

For permissions contact:  
[debbie@stmarksmk.com](mailto:debbie@stmarksmk.com)

Cover photo by [Kyle Peyton](#) on [Unsplash](#)