

## A Time of Wilderness

### Spiritual Reflections during Lockdown, #4

#### The Angel at the Tomb

Returning to the resurrection this week as we continue to journey through Eastertide, I'd like to look at a poem by Ruth Fainlight called 'The Angel'. In the Gospel accounts of the resurrection, the angels are said to have moved away the stone or boulder which covered the entrance to Christ's tomb. Without the angels it wouldn't have happened. In the poem, Fainlight is trying to push the boulder away herself. She is putting all her physical strength into it, pushing so hard against the boulder that her shoulders are bruised. But she cannot move it. All her efforts are in vain, because she needs the angels to move the stone. Yet, I think that all that effort was necessary. Perhaps that is the only way the angel comes – through some sense of effort and exertion on our part? If Mary Magdalen and the other women had not had the bravery and courage to visit the tomb, they would not have witnessed the angel or the open tomb.

The boulder in the poem is symbolic of those things we find difficult in life, which need our effort to overcome. At the moment, during the Covid-19 crisis, we all have pandemic-related stones we would like to move away. When can I see my family and friends again? When can I be near people again and not have to worry about getting closer than 2 metres? When can I not live in fear of catching this virus, or worrying about those we know and love catching it? When we I stop having to deal with the loneliness of isolation? When will I get my life back? **Many of us already have very bruised shoulders.**

Even if we can't remove these boulders right now, we might find ways to see beyond them. Perhaps it is when we have the courage to face them that the angels come to help, support and encourage us. This is not only about moving the stones, it is about finding what is beyond them, and seeing into the empty tomb. Seeing the empty tomb is to see the hope of the future, of what is to come.

We are lucky that in St Michael's Church we are surrounded by angels in our stained-glass windows and other decorations. Perhaps we have become so used to their presence that we've stop really looking at them? I've witnessed lots of people who come to St Michael's for the first time, or the first time in many years, who are mesmerized by the sight of our east window and its myriad of angels. When we can be in church again, perhaps we should spend a while in their presence and reflect on the stones that have been pushed away in our own lives with the help of angels, stones that have been overcome to bring us back to that place again.

#### Ideas for prayer

**Offer to God your responses to the following: What boulders or stones are we straining to push away? Where can we find evidence of the divine in our lives, and where would we like angels to help us? What does the empty tomb behind the stone mean to us? Then hand over your stones to God, let the burden be taken by the one who knows us and all our worries completely.**

#### **The Angel**

*Sometimes the boulder is rolled away,  
but I cannot move it when  
I want to. An angel must. Shall  
I ever see the angel's face,  
or will there always only be  
that molten glow outlining every  
separate hair and feathered quill,  
the sudden wind and odour, sunlight,  
music, the pain of my bruised  
shoulders.*

Ruth Fainlight