

Husein Abdi Kahin is not a readily recognisable name- Sir Mo Farah, however, is. Probably like you, I was very touched by the BBC programme on Sir Mo Farah, the fabulous Olympic athlete who has been so inspirational a figure for thousands of young athletes in Britain. Husein or Mo? Who is he? Is he Husein, that 9 year old child, trafficked by an unknown woman in West London to be a domestic slave to a family in Hounslow, or is he Mo, the superstar causing post boxes to be painted gold in Teddington after his Olympic victories. To have had the courage to reveal his true story, this last week, both shames our society in its hiding of modern day slavery, but also spotlights Husein/Mo's huge integrity and humility in coming clean.

As we celebrate Mary Magdalen's feast day in the church, so we recognise someone else who has left a self behind and made a new future. All we know of her is that she is called Mary- Mariam- and came from a village on the north west side of the Sea of Galilee called, Magdala. She is simply Mary from the village of Magdala. The biblical story suggests that her life was troubled, she carried heavy burdens- perhaps we would say, mental health issues.

Somehow she met this Jesus of Nazareth- after all they were from the same district, perhaps moved in the same circles. There is no evidence in the biblical story to suggest, however, that any of the innuendo that built up around her, about her sexual life had any basis in fact.

But something changed.

Daylight dawned. Throughout the scriptures darkness and light are always placed in contrast. Mary, as the story reminds us, had gone to the tomb 'while it was still dark'- meaning also, while she was still in the dark, in the night time fear of loss, anger and abandonment and hopelessness 'while it was still dark'. Darkness stands for unfaith. So it is not surprising that in darkness, unfaith, she fails to recognise the risen one and assumes him to be the gardener. The story then says, she turned. The same word, she turned means she changed, - it's what we ask at baptism- do you turn to Christ? In turning she changes, darkness turns to light,

unfaith to faith, a dawning. Mary Magdalene becomes the apostle to the apostles, Mary Magdalen sheds the old identity of this follower: confused and distressed, appalled by witnessing what has happened in Jerusalem, distraught at the empty tomb and in this dawn time, this dawning encounter is changed, turns, to assert her new found identity, has the courage and humility to acknowledge 'my Lord and my God'.

But recognition is by no means the end. Turning and inhabiting a truer, fuller identity, as Sir Mo Farah has discovered, is by no means an easy step, painless or clean. And even after her turning, Mary Magdalene has more to learn, for this risen one,

says, 'do not cling to me', do not hold on to the old ways. Turning means a constant re-assessment, willingness to step out into the new.

How many Anglicans does it take to change a lightbulb- change, never! Yes, I'm as guilty as anyone of liking my church traditional- in the sense that I like the patterns I value, the liturgy I know, the hymns I like to sing. But, as we heard again on Tuesday evening at the induction of the new vicar at Chelsea Old Church 'The church is called to interpret afresh to each generation', the good news of Jesus Christ.

So for Mary to undergo such radical change, from darkness to light, from fear to hope, is a huge

journey. For her to run to the Apostles and say 'I have seen the Lord' requires not only substantial courage and conviction, but a willingness to step outside her role in background support for the people of the way, and to risk a huge step into the limelight. To interpret afresh to her generation to Thomas and Peter and the others who were still in the dark, likewise for the host of Christ's followers through the ages. To know the dawning light, the recognition of this Christ, the divine way of living as a fully human child of God, requires constant reassessment, willingness to change and to take risk. It's not any easy task, nor, a comfortable one.

Sir Mo Farah has taught us an important lesson about self identity, one which Mary Magdalene had to contemplate before him, and one which requires

each of us to face up to- just who are we as God's children?, how are we prepared to be changed?, to risk a future, for a God who is ever old and ever new.

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