

Noli Me Tangere

Noli me tangere. Don't touch me!

Why? Rabboni, Teacher, Lord, Master, Doctor, Gardener, Saviour, Jesus?

Have I become unclean, or are you too pure for me to touch you now?

I, Mary of Magdala, who washed your feet with my tears,

And dried them with my golden hair just a month ago.

Or is your resurrection body still too new, too sensitive,

Regeneration too unfamiliar, too unsteady in this pre-dawn hour?

Another week and Thomas gets the full guided tour, hands, feet, side.

But I have been written out by time, translation, patriarchy.

Your Aramaic was not quite so brusque.

“Mary, you don't need to cling to me, I'll always be with you now.”

And John then wrote it μή μου ἄπτου meaning “stop clinging to me”.

The Latin Church made it “don't touch me” with ascetic Jerome's Vulgate.

The old story of Roman excess spawning Puritan repression even then.

Good for paintings by Fra Angelico et al., or a statue by Wynne in Ely,

But not for my reputation.



Today, Easter in Exeter, all our thoughts and touches, clean or unclean,

Sacred or fleshly, are purified by your love for humanity in all our waywardness.

The Lenten magnolia candles were the cups from which you drank wine or tears.

Now, with bushes budding, blossom blushing, branches bearing their first green tints,

Vibrant voices of men and maidens raise you out of the stillness with joyful elation,

And I will weave a new and verdant crown of gentler sprigs and softer colours

To place upon your bloodied head and soothe the rawness of your wounds, my Jesus.

Richard Barnes – March 2016/April 2017.